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ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

AWFUL!

DON'T WASTE TIME ON THIS CRAP!

WORKS OF ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

Cardigan
The Maid-at-Arms
The Reckoning
Lorraine
Maids of Paradise
Ashes of Empire
The Red Republic
The King in Yellow
The Maker of Moons
A King and a Few Dukes
The Conspirators
The Cambric Mask
The Haunts of Men
Outsiders
A Young Man in a Hurry
In Search of the Unknown
In the Quarter
The Mystery of Choice
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FOR CHILDREN

Outdoor-Land
Orchard-Land
River-Land
Forest-Land

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"The little things," he continued, delicately perforating the atmosphere as though selecting a diatom.

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By

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

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TO

GEORGE HORACE LORIMER

PREFACE

DOES anybody remember the opera of *The Inca,* and that heart-breaking episode where the Court Undertaker, in a morbid desire to increase his professional skill, deliberately accomplishes the destruction of his middle-aged relatives in order to inter them for the sake of practise?

If I recollect, his dismal confession runs something like this:

> "It was in a bleak November
> When I slew them, I remember,
> As I caught them unawares
> Drinking tea in rocking-chairs."

And so he talked them to death, the subject being "What Really is Art?" Afterward he was sorry—

" The squeak of a door,
The creak of the floor,
My horrors and fears enhance;
And I wake with a scream
As I hear in my dream
The shrieks of my maiden aunts!"

Now it is a very dreadful thing to suggest that those highly respectable pseudo-spinsters, the Sister Arts, supposedly cozily immune in their polygamous chastity (for every suitor for favor is popularly expected to be wedded to his particular art)—I repeat, it is very dreadful to suggest that these impeccable old ladies are in danger of being talked to death.

But the talkers are talking and Art Nouveau rockers are rocking, and the trousers of the prophet are patched with stained glass, and it is a day of dinkiness and of thumbs.

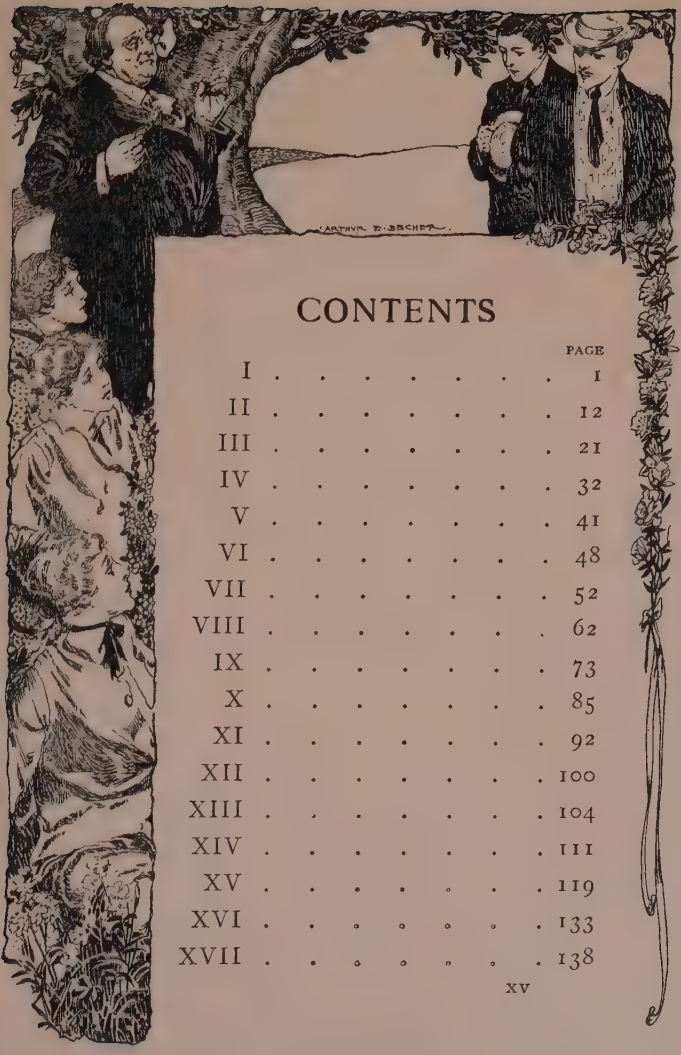
Let us find comfort in the ancient proverb: "Art talked to death shall rise again." Let us also recollect that " Dinky is as dinky does "; that "All is not Shaw that Bernards "; that " Better Yeates than Clever "; that words are so inexpensive that there is no moral crime in robbing Henry to pay James.

Firmly believing all this, abjuring all atom-

pickers, slab furniture, and woodchuck literature—save only the immortal verse:

"And there the wooden-chuck doth tread;
While from the oak trees' tops
The red, red squirrel on thy head
The frequent acorn drops."

Abjuring, as I say, dinkiness in all its forms, we may still hope that those cleanly and respectable spinsters, the Sister Arts, will continue throughout the ages, rocking and drinking tea unterrified by the million-tongued clamor in the back yard and below stairs, where thumb and forefinger continue the question demanded by intellectual exhaustion: "L'arr! Kesker say l'arr?"



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IOLE

I

"I AIN'T never knowed no one like him," continued the station-agent reflectively. "He made us all look like monkeys, but he was good to us. Ever see a ginuine poet, sir?"

"Years ago one was pointed out to me," replied Briggs.

"Was yours smooth shaved, with large, fat, white fingers?" inquired the station-agent.

"If I remember correctly, he was thin," said Briggs, sitting down on his suit-case and gazing apprehensively around at the landscape.

There was nothing to see but low, forbidding mountains, and forests, and a railroad track curving into a tunnel.

The station-agent shoved his hairy hands into the pockets of his overalls, jingled an unseen bunch of keys, and chewed a dry grass stem, ruminating the while in an undertone:

"This poet come here five years ago with all them kids, an' the fust thing he done was to dress up his girls in boys' pants. Then he went an' built a humpy sort o' house out of stones and boulders. Then he went to work an' wrote pieces for the papers about jaybirds an' woodchucks an' goddesses. He claimed the woods was full of goddesses. That was his way, sir."

The agent contemplated the railroad track, running his eye along the perspective of polished rails:

"Yes, sir; his name was—and is—Clarence Guilford, an' I fust seen it signed to a piece in the Uticy Star. An' next I knowed, folks began to stop off here inquirin' for Mr. Guilford. 'Is this here where Guilford, the poet, lives?' sez they; an' they come thicker an' thicker in warm weather. There wasn't no wagon to take 'em up to Guilford's, but they

didn't care, an' they called it a lit'r'y shrine, an' they hit the pike, women, children, men —'speshil the women, an' I heard 'em tellin' how Guilford dressed his kids in pants an' how Guilford was a famous new lit'r'y poet, an' they said he was fixin' to lecture in Uticy."

The agent gnawed off the chewed portion of the grass stem, readjusted it, and fixed his eyes on vacancy.

"Three year this went on. Mr. Guilford was makin' his pile, I guess. He set up a shop an' hired art bookbinders from York. Then he set up another shop an' hired some of us 'round here to go an' make them big, slabby art-chairs. All his shops was called "At the sign of" somethin' 'r other. Bales of vellum arrived for to bind little dinky books; art rocking-chairs was shipped out o' here by the carload. Meanwhile Guilford he done poetry on the side an' run a magazine; an' hearin' the boys was makin' big money up in that crank community, an' that the town was boomin', I was plum fool enough to drop my job here an' be a art-worker up to Rose-Cross—that's where the shops was; 'bout three mile back of his house into the woods."

The agent removed his hands from his overalls and folded his arms grimly.

"Well?" inquired Briggs, looking up from his perch on the suit-case.

"Well, sir," continued the agent, "the hull thing bust. I guess the public kinder sickened o' them art-rockers an' dinky books without much printin' into them. Guilford he stuck to it noble, but the shops closed one by one. My wages wasn't paid for three months; the boys that remained got together that autumn an' fixed it up to quit in a bunch.

"The poet was sad; he come out to the shops an' he says, 'Boys,' sez he, 'art is long an' life is dam brief. I ain't got the cash, but,' sez he, 'you can levy onto them art-rockers an' the dinky vellum books in stock, an',' sez he, 'you can take the hand-presses an' the tools an' bales o' vellum, which is very precious, an' all the wagons an' hosses, an' go sell 'em in that proud world that refuses to receive my message. The woodland fellowship is rent,' sez he, wavin' his plump fingers at us with the rings sparklin' on 'em.

"Then the boys looked glum, an' they nudged me an' kinder shoved me front. So, bein' elected, I sez, 'Friend,' sez I, 'art is on

the bum. It ain't your fault; the boys is sad an' sorrerful, but they ain't never knocked you to nobody, Mr. Guilford. You was good to us; you done your damdest. You made up pieces for the magazines an' papers an' you advertised how we was all cranks together here at Rose-Cross, a-lovin' Nature an' dicky-birds, an' wanderin' about half nood for art's sake.

"'Mr. Guilford,' sez I, 'that gilt brick went. But it has went as far as it can travel an' is now reposin' into the soup. Git wise or eat hay, sir. Art is on the blink.'"

The agent jingled his keys with a melancholy wink at Briggs.

"So I come back here, an' thankful to hold down this job. An' five mile up the pike is that there noble poet an' his kids a-makin' up pieces for to sell to the papers, an' a sorrerin' over the cold world what refuses to buy his poems—an' a mortgage onto his house an' a threat to foreclose."

"Indeed," said Briggs dreamily, for it was his business to attend to the foreclosure of the mortgage on the poet's house.

"Was you fixin' to go up an' see the place?" inquired the agent.

"Shall I be obliged to walk?"

"I guess you will if you can't flutter," replied the agent. "I ain't got no wagon an' no horse."

"How far is it?"

"Five mile, sir."

With a groan Mr. Briggs arose, lifted his suit-case, and, walking to the platform's edge, cast an agitated glance up the dusty road.

Then he turned around and examined the single building in sight—station, water-tower, post-office and telegraph-office all in one, and incidentally the abode of the station-agent, whose duties included that of postmaster and operator.

"I'll write a letter first," said Briggs. And this is what he wrote:

ROSE-CROSS P. O.,
June 25, 1904.

DEAR WAYNE: Do you remember that tract of land, adjoining your preserve, which you attempted to buy four years ago? It was held by a crank community, and they refused to sell, and made trouble for your patrols by dumping dye-stuffs and sawdust into the Ashton Creek.

Well, the community has broken up, the shops are in ruins, and there is nobody there now except that bankrupt poet, Guilford. I bought the mortgage for you, foreseeing a slump in that sort of art, and I expect to begin foreclosure proceedings and buy in the tract, which, as you will recollect, includes some fine game cover and the Ashton stream, where you wanted to establish a hatchery. This is a God-forsaken spot. I'm on my way to the poet's now. Shall I begin foreclosure proceedings and fire him? Wire me what to do. Yours,

BRIGGS.

Wayne received this letter two days later. Preoccupied as he was in fitting out his yacht for commission, he wired briefly, "Fire poet," and dismissed the matter from his mind.

The next day, grappling with the problem of Japanese stewards and the decadence of all sailormen, he received a telegram from Briggs:

"Can't you manage to come up here?"

Irritated, he telegraphed back:

"Impossible. Why don't you arrange to

fire poet?" And Briggs replied: "Can't fire poet. There are extenuating circumstances."

"Did you say exterminating or extenuating?" wired Wayne. "I said extenuating," replied Briggs.

Then the following telegrams were exchanged in order:

(1)

What are the extenuating circumstances?

WAYNE.

(2)

Eight innocent children. Come up at once.

BRIGGS.

(3)

Boat in commission. Can't go. Why don't you fix things? WAYNE.

(4)

How? BRIGGS.

(5)

(Dated NEW LONDON.)

What on earth is the matter with you? Are you going to fix things and join me at Bar Harbor or are you not? WAYNE.

(6)

As I don't know how you want me to fix things, I can not join you. BRIGGS.

(7)

(Dated PORTLAND, MAINE.)

Stuyvesant Briggs, what the devil is the matter with you? It's absolutely necessary that I have the Ashton stream for a hatchery, and you know it. What sort of a business man are you, anyhow? Of course I don't propose to treat that poet inhumanly. Arrange to bid in the tract, run up the price against your own bidding, and let the poet have a few thousand if he is hard put. Don't worry me any more; I'm busy with a fool crew, and you are spoiling my cruise by not joining me.

WAYNE.

(8)

He won't do it. BRIGGS.

(9)

Who won't do *what?* WAYNE.

(10)

Poet refuses to discuss the matter.

BRIGGS.

(11)

Fire that poet. You've spoiled my cruise with your telegrams. WAYNE.

(12)

(*Marked "Collect."*)

Look here, George Wayne, don't drive me to desperation. You ought to come up and face the situation yourself. I can't fire a poet with eight helpless children, can I? And while I'm about it, let me inform you that every time you telegraph me it costs me five dollars for a carrier to bring the despatch over from the station; and every time I telegraph you I am obliged to walk five miles to send it and five miles back again. I'm mad all through, and my shoes are worn out, and I'm tired. Besides, I'm too busy to telegraph.

BRIGGS.

(13)

Do you expect me to stop my cruise and travel up to that hole on account of eight extenuating kids? WAYNE.

(14)

I do. BRIGGS.

(15)

Are you mad? WAYNE.

(16)

Thoroughly. And extremely busy.
BRIGGS.

(17)

For the last time, Stuyve Briggs, are you going to bounce one defaulting poet and progeny, arrange to have survey and warnings posted, order timber and troughs for hatchery, engage extra patrol—or are you not?
WAYNE.

(18)

No. BRIGGS.

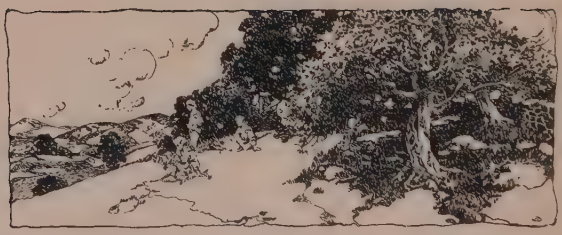
(19)

(*Received a day later by Mr. Wayne.*)
Are you coming? BRIGGS.

(20)

I'm coming to punch your head.
WAYNE.

II



WHEN George Wayne arrived at Rose-Cross station, seaburnt, angry, and in excellent athletic condition, Briggs locked himself in the waiting-room and attempted to calm the newcomer from the window.

"If you're going to pitch into me, George," he said, "I'm hanged if I come out, and you can go to Guilford's alone."

"Come out of there," said Wayne dangerously.

"It isn't because I'm afraid of you," explained Briggs, "but it's merely that I don't choose to present either you or myself to a lot

of pretty girls with the marks of conflict all over our eyes and noses."

At the words "pretty girls" Wayne's battle-set features relaxed. He motioned to the Pullman porter to deposit his luggage on the empty platform; the melancholy bell-notes of the locomotive sounded, the train moved slowly forward.

"Pretty girls?" he repeated in a softer voice. "Where are they staying? Of course, under the circumstances a personal encounter is superfluous. Where are they staying?"

"At Guilford's. I told you so in my telegrams, didn't I?"

"No, you didn't. You spoke only of a poet and his eight helpless children."

"Well, those girls are the eight children," retorted Briggs sullenly, emerging from the station.

"Do you mean to tell me——"

"Yes, I do. They're his children, aren't they—even if they are girls, and pretty." He offered a mollifying hand; Wayne took it, shook it uncertainly, and fell into step beside his friend. "Eight pretty girls," he repeated under his breath. "What did you do, Stuyve?"

"What was I to do?" inquired Briggs, nervously worrying his short blond mustache. "When I arrived here I had made up my mind to fire the poet and arrange for the hatchery and patrol. The farther I walked through the dust of this accursed road, lugging my suit-case as you are doing now, the surer I was that I'd get rid of the poet without mercy. But——"

"Well?" inquired Wayne, astonished.

"But when I'd trudged some five miles up the stifling road I suddenly emerged into a wonderful mountain meadow. I tell you, George, it looked fresh and sweet as Heaven after that dusty, parching tramp—a mountain meadow deep with mint and juicy green grasses, and all cut up by little rushing streams as cold as ice. There were a lot of girls in pink sunbonnets picking wild strawberries in the middle distance," he added thoughtfully. "It was picturesque, wasn't it? Come, now, George, wouldn't that give you pause?—eight girls in pink pajamas——"

"What!!!"

"And sunbonnets—a sort of dress reform of the poet's."

"Well?" inquired Wayne coldly.

"And there was the 'house beautiful,' mercifully screened by woods," continued Briggs. "He calls it the house beautiful, you know."

"Why not the beautiful house?" asked Wayne, still more coldly.

"Oh, he gets everything upside down. Guilford is harmless, you'll see." He began to whistle Fatinitza softly. There was a silence; then Wayne said:

"You interrupted your narrative."

"Where was I?"

"In the foreground with eight pink pajamas in the middle distance."

"Oh, yes. So there I was, travel-worn, thirsty, weary, uncertain——"

"Cut it," observed Wayne.

"And a stranger," continued Briggs with dignity, "in a strange country——"

"Peculiarity of strangers."

Briggs took no notice. "I drank from the cool springs; I lingered to pluck a delicious berry or two, I bathed my hot face, I——"

"Where," demanded Wayne, "were the eight pink 'uns?"

"Still in the middle distance. Don't interrupt me, George; I'm slowly drawing closer to them."

"Well, get a move on," retorted Wayne sulkily.

"I'm quite close to them now," explained Briggs; "close enough to remove my hat and smile and inquire the way to Guilford's. One superb young creature, with creamy skin and very red lips——"

Wayne halted and set down his suit-case.

"I'm not romancing; you'll see," said Briggs earnestly. "As I was saying, this young goddess looked at me in the sweetest way and said that Guilford was her father. And, Wayne, do you know what she did? She—er—came straight up to me and took hold of my hand, and led me up the path toward the high-art house, which is built of cobblestones! Think! Built of cobble——"

"Took you by the hand?" repeated Wayne incredulously.

"Oh, it was all right, George! I found out all about that sort of innocent thing later."

"Did you?"

"Certainly. These girls have been brought up like so many guileless speckled fawns out here in the backwoods. You know all about Guilford, the poet who's dead stuck on Nature and simplicity. Well, that's the man and

that's his pose. He hasn't any money, and he won't work. His daughters raise vegetables, and he makes 'em wear bloomers, and he writes about chippy-birds and the house beautiful, and tells people to be natural, and wishes that everybody could go around without clothes and pick daisies——"

"Do *they?*" demanded Wayne in an awful voice. "You *said* they wore bloomers. Did you say that to break the news more gently? Did you!"

"Of course they are clothed," explained his friend querulously; "though sometimes they wade about without shoes and stockings and do the nymph business. And, George, it's astonishing how modest that sort of dress is. And it's amazing how much they know. Why, they can talk Greek—*talk* it, mind you. Every one of them can speak half a dozen languages—Guilford is a corker on culture, you know—and they can play harps and pianos and things, and give me thirty at tennis, even Chlorippe, the twelve-year-old——"

"Is that her name?" asked Wayne.

"Chlorippe? Yes. That bat-headed poet named all his children after butterflies. Let's see," he continued, telling off the names on

his fingers; "there's Chlorippe, twelve; Philodice, thirteen; Dione, fourteen; Aphrodite, fifteen; Cybele, sixteen; Lissa, seventeen; Iole, eighteen, and Vanessa, nineteen. And, Wayne, never have the Elysian fields contained such a bunch of wholesome beauty as that mountain meadow contains all day long."

Wayne, trudging along, suit-case firmly gripped, turned a pair of suspicious eyes upon his friend.

"Of course," observed Briggs candidly, "I simply couldn't foreclose on the father of such children, could I? Besides, he won't let me discuss the subject."

"I'll investigate the matter personally," said Wayne.

"Nowhere to lay their heads! Think of it, George. And all because a turtle-fed, claret-flushed, idle and rich young man wants their earthly Paradise for a fish-hatchery. Think of it! A pampered, turtle-fed——"

"You've said that before," snapped Wayne. "If you were half decent you'd help me with this suit-case. Whew! It's hot as Yonkers on this cattle-trail you call a road. How near are we to Guilford's?"

An hour later Briggs said: "By the way, George, what are you going to do about the matter?"

Wayne, flushed, dusty, perspiring, scowled at him.

"What matter?"

"The foreclosure."

"I don't know; how can I know until I see Guilford?"

"But you need the hatchery——"

"I know it."

"But he won't let you discuss it——"

"If," said Wayne angrily, "you had spent half the time talking business with the poet that you spent picking strawberries with his helpless children I should not now be lugging this suit-case up this mountain. Decency requires few observations from *you* just now."

"Pooh!" said Briggs. "Wait till you see Iole."

"Why Iole? Why not Vanessa?"

"Don't—that's all," retorted Briggs, reddening.

Wayne plumped his valise down in the dust, mopped his brow, folded his arms, and regarded Briggs between the eyes.

"You have the infernal cheek, after getting

me up here, to intimate that you have taken the pick?"

"I do," replied Briggs firmly. The two young fellows faced each other.

"By the way," observed Briggs casually, "the stock they come from is as good if not better than ours. This is a straight game."

"Do you mean to say that you—you are—seriously——"

"Something like it. There! Now you know."

"For Heaven's sake, Stuyve——"

"Yes, for Heaven's sake and in Heaven's name don't get any wrong ideas into your vicious head."

"What?"

"I tell you," said Briggs, "that I was never closer to falling in love than I am to-day. And I've been here just two weeks."

"Oh, Lord——"

"Amen," muttered Briggs. "Here, give me your carpet-bag, you brute. We're on the edge of Paradise."

III

BEFORE we discuss my financial difficulties," said the poet, lifting his plump white hand and waving it in unctuous waves about the veranda, "let me show you our home, Mr. Wayne. May I?"

"Certainly," said Wayne politely, following Guilford into the house.

They entered a hall; there was absolutely nothing in the hall except a small table on which reposed a single daisy in a glass of water.

"Simplicity," breathed Guilford—"a single blossom against a background of nothing at all. You follow me, Mr. Wayne?"

"Not—exactly——"

The poet smiled a large, tender smile, and, with inverted thumb, executed a gesture as though making several spots in the air.

"The concentration of composition," he explained; "the elimination of complexity; the isolation of the concrete in the center of the abstract; something in the midst of nothing. It is a very precious thought, Mr. Wayne."

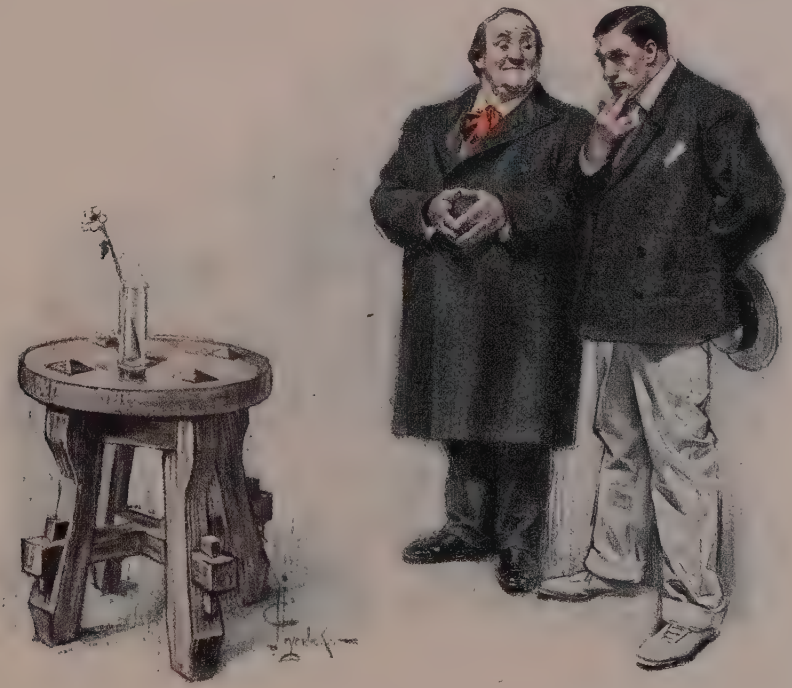
"Certainly," muttered Wayne; and they moved on.

"This," said the poet, "is what I call my den."

Wayne, not knowing what to say, sidled around the walls. It was almost bare of furniture; what there was appeared to be of the slab variety.

"I call my house the house beautiful," murmured Guilford with his large, sweet smile. "Beauty is simplicity; beauty is unconsciousness; beauty is the child of elimination. A single fly in an empty room is beautiful to me, Mr. Wayne."

"They carry germs," muttered Wayne, but the poet did not hear him and led the way to another enormous room, bare of everything



"Simplicity," breathed Guilford—"a single blossom against a background of nothing at all."

save for eight thick and very beautiful Kazak rugs on the polished floor.

"My children's bedroom," he whispered solemnly.

"You don't mean to say they sleep on those Oriental rugs!" stammered Wayne.

"They do," murmured the poet. The tender sweetness of his ample smile was overpowering—like too much bay rum after shaving. "Sparta, Mr. Wayne, Sparta! And the result? My babes are perfect, physically, spiritually. Elimination wrought the miracle; yonder they sleep, innocent as the Graces, with all the windows open, clothed in moonlight or starlight, as the astronomical conditions may be. At the break of dawn they are afield, simply clothed, free limbed, unhampered by the tawdry harness of degenerate civilization. And as they wander through the verdure," he added with rapt enthusiasm, "plucking shy blossoms, gathering simples and herbs and vegetables for our bountiful and natural repast, they sing as they go, and every tremulous thrill of melody falls like balm on a father's heart." The overpowering sweetness of his smile drugged Wayne. Presently he edged toward the door, and the poet followed, a

dreamy radiance on his features as though emanating from sacred inward meditation.

They sat down on the veranda; Wayne fumbled for his cigar-case, but his unnerved fingers fell away; he dared not smoke.

"About—about that business matter," he ventured feebly; but the poet raised his plump white hand.

"You are my guest," he said graciously. "While you are my guest nothing shall intrude to cloud our happiness."

Perplexed, almost muddled, Wayne strove in vain to find a reason for the elimination of the matter that had interrupted his cruise and brought him to Rose-Cross, the maddest yachtsman on the Atlantic. Why should Guilford forbid the topic as though its discussion were painful to Wayne?

"He always gets the wrong end foremost, as Briggs said," thought the young man. "I wonder where the deuce Briggs can be? I'm no match for this bunch."

His thoughts halted; he became aware that the poet was speaking in a rich, resonant voice, and he listened in an attitude of painful politeness.

"It's the little things that are most pre-

cious," the poet was saying, and pinched the air with forefinger and thumb and pursed up his lips as though to whistle some saccharine air.

"The little things," he continued, delicately perforating the atmosphere as though selecting a diatom.

"Big things go, too," ventured Wayne.

"No," said the poet; "no—or rather they *do* go, in a certain sense, for every little thing is precious, and therefore little things are big! – big with portent, big in value. Do you follow me, Mr. Wayne?"

Wayne's fascinated eyes were fixed on the poet. The latter picked out another atom from the atmosphere and held it up for Mr. Wayne's inspection; and while that young man's eyes protruded the poet rambled on and on until the melody of his voice became a ceaseless sound, a vague, sustained monotone, which seemed to bore into Wayne's brain until his legs twitched with a furious desire for flight.

When he obtained command of himself the poet was saying, "It is my hour for withdrawal. It were insincere and artificial to ask your indulgence——"

He rose to his rotund height.

"You are due to sit in your cage," stammered Wayne, comprehending.

"My den," corrected the poet, saturating the air with the sweetness of his smile.

Wayne arose. "About that business—" he began desperately; but the poet's soft, heavy hand hovered in mid-air, and Wayne sat down so suddenly that when his eyes recovered their focus the poet had disappeared.

A benumbed resentment struggled within him for adequate expression; he hitched his chair about to command a view of the meadow, then sat motionless, hypnotized by the view. Eight girls, clad in pink blouses and trousers, golden hair twisted up, decorated the landscape. Some were kneeling, filling baskets of woven, scented grasses with wild strawberries; some were wading the branches of the meadow brook, searching for trout with grass-woven nets; some picked early peas; two were playing a lightning set at tennis. And in the center of everything that was going on was Briggs, perfectly at ease, making himself agreeably at home.

The spectacle of Briggs among the Hamadryads appeared to paralyze Wayne.

Then an immense, intense resentment set

every nerve in him tingling. Briggs, his friend, his confidential business adviser, his indispensable *alter ego,* had abandoned him to be tormented by this fat, saccharine poet—abandoned him while he, Briggs, made himself popular with eight of the most amazingly bewitching maidens mortal man might marvel on! The meanness stung Wayne till he jumped to his feet and strode out into the sunshine, menacing eyes fastened on Briggs.

"Now wouldn't that sting you!" he breathed fiercely, turning up his trousers and stepping gingerly across the brook.

Whether or not Briggs saw him coming and kept sidling away he could not determine; he did not wish to shout; he kept passing pretty girls and taking off his hat, and following Briggs about, but he never seemed to come any nearer to Briggs; Briggs always appeared in the middle distance, flitting genially from girl to girl; and presently the absurdity of his performance struck Wayne, and he sat down on the bank of the brook, too mad to think. There was a pretty girl picking strawberries near-by; he rose, took off his hat to her, and sat down again. She was one of those graceful, clean-limbed, creamy-skinned

creatures described by Briggs; her hair was twisted up into a heavy, glistening knot, showing the back of a white neck; her eyes matched the sky and her lips the berries she occasionally bit into or dropped to the bottom of her woven basket.

Once or twice she looked up fearlessly at Wayne as her search for berries brought her nearer; and Wayne forgot the perfidy of Briggs in an effort to look politely amiable.

Presently she straightened up where she was kneeling in the long grass and stretched her arms. Then, still kneeling, she gazed curiously at Wayne with all the charm of a friendly wild thing unafraid.

"Shall we play tennis?" she asked.

"Certainly," said Wayne, startled.

"Come, then," she said, picking up her basket in one hand and extending the other to Wayne.

He took the fresh, cool fingers, and turned scarlet. Once his glance sneaked toward Briggs, but that young man was absorbed in fishing for brook trout with a net! Oh, ye little fishes! with a *net!*

Wayne's brain seemed to be swarming with glittering pink-winged thoughts all singing.

He walked on air, holding tightly to the hand of his goddess, seeing nothing but a blur of green and sunshine. Then a clean-cut idea stabbed him like a stiletto: was this Vanessa or Iole? And, to his own astonishment, he asked her quite naturally.

"Iole," she said, laughing. "Why?"

"Thank goodness," he said irrationally.

"But why?" she persisted curiously.

"Briggs—Briggs—" he stammered, and got no further. Perplexed, his goddess walked on, thoughtful, pure-lidded eyes searching some reasonable interpretation for the phrase, "Briggs—Briggs." But as Wayne gave her no aid, she presently dismissed the problem, and bade him select a tennis bat.

"I do hope you play well," she said. Her hope was comparatively vain; she batted Wayne around the court, drove him wildly from corner to corner, stampeded him with volleys, lured him with lobs, and finally left him reeling dizzily about, while she came around from behind the net, saying, "It's all because you have no tennis shoes. Come; we'll rest under the trees and console ourselves with chess."

Under a group of huge silver beeches a

stone chess-table was set embedded in the moss; and Iole indolently stretched herself out on one side, chin on hands, while Wayne sorted weather-beaten basalt and marble chessmen which lay in a pile under the tree.

She chatted on without the faintest trace of self-consciousness the while he arranged the pieces; then she began to move. He took a long time between each move; but no sooner did he move than, still talking, she extended her hand and shoved her piece into place without a fraction of a second's hesitation.

When she had mated him twice, and he was still gazing blankly at the mess into which she had driven his forces, she sat up sideways, gathering her slim ankles into one hand, and cast about her for something to do, eyes wandering over the sunny meadow.

"We had horses," she mused; "we rode like demons, bareback, until trouble came."

"Trouble?"

"Oh, not trouble—poverty. So our horses had to go. What shall we do—you and I?" There was something so subtly sweet, so exquisitely innocent in the coupling of the pronouns that a thrill passed completely through

Wayne, and probably came out on the other side.

"I know what I'm going to do," he said, drawing a note-book and a pencil from his pocket and beginning to write, holding it so she could see.

"Do you want me to look over your shoulder?" she asked.

"Please."

She did; and it affected his penmanship so that the writing grew wabbly. Still she could read:

(*Telegram*)

To Sailing Master, Yacht Thendara, Bar Harbor:

Put boat out of commission. I may be away all summer. Wayne.

"How far is it to the station?" asked Wayne, turning to look into her eyes.

"Only five miles," she said. "I'll walk with you if you like. Shall I?"

IV

"WEALTH," observed the poet, waving his heavy white hand, "is a figure of speech, Mr. Wayne. Only by the process of elimination can one arrive at the exquisite simplicity of poverty—care-free poverty. Even a single penny is a burden—the flaw in the marble, the fly in the amber of perfection. Cast it away and enter Eden!" And joining thumb and forefinger, he plucked a figurative copper from the atmosphere, tossed it away, and wiped his fingers on his handkerchief.

"But—" began Wayne uneasily.

"Try it," smiled the poet, diffusing sweetness; "try it. Dismiss all thoughts of money from your mind."

"I do," said Wayne, somewhat relieved. "I thought you meant for me to chuck my securities overboard and eat herbs."

"Not in your case—no, not in your case. *I* can do that; I have done it. No, your sacred mission is simply to forget that you are wealthy. That is a very precious thought, Mr. Wayne—remain a Crœsus and forget it! Not to eliminate your *wealth,* but eliminate all *thought* of it. Very, very precious."

"Well, I never think about things like that except at a directors' meeting," blurted out the young fellow. "Perhaps it's because I've never had to think about it."

The poet sighed so sweetly that the atmosphere seemed to drip with the saccharine injection.

"I wish," ventured Wayne, "that you would let me mention the subject of business"—the poet shook his head indulgently—"just to say that I'm not going to foreclose." He laid a packet of legal papers in the poet's hand.

"Hush," smiled Guilford, "this is not

seemly in the house beautiful. . . . *What* was it you said, Mr. Wayne?"

"I? I was going to say that I just wanted —wanted to stay here—be your guest, if you'll let me," he said honestly. "I was cruising—I didn't understand—Briggs—Briggs—" He stuck.

"Yes, Briggs," softly suggested the poet, spraying the night air with more sweetness.

"Briggs has spoken to you about—about your daughter Vanessa. You see, Briggs is my closest friend; his happiness is—er—important to me. I want to see Briggs happy; that's why I want to stay here, just to see Briggs happy. I—I love Briggs. You understand me, don't you, Mr. Guilford?"

The poet breathed a dulcet breath. "Perfectly," he murmured. "The contemplation of Mr. Briggs' happiness eliminates all thoughts of self within you. By this process of elimination you arrive at happiness yourself. Ah, the thought is a very precious one, my young friend, for by elimination only can we arrive at perfection. Thank you for the thought; thank you. You have given me a very, very precious thought to cherish."

"I—I have been here a week," muttered

Wayne. "I thought—perhaps—my welcome might be outworn——"

"In the house beautiful," murmured the poet, rising and waving his heavy white hand at the open door, "welcome is eternal." He folded his arms with difficulty, for he was stout, and one hand clutched the legal papers; his head sank. In profound meditation he wandered away into the shadowy house, leaving Wayne sitting on the veranda rail, eyes fixed on a white shape dimly seen moving through the moonlit meadows below. Briggs sauntered into sight presently, his arms full of flowers.

"Get me a jug of water, will you? Vanessa has been picking these and she sent me back to fix 'em. Hurry, man! She is waiting for me in the garden." Wayne gazed earnestly at his friend.

"So you have done it, have you, Stuyve?"

"Done what?" demanded Briggs, blushing.

"It."

"If you mean," he said with dignity, "that I've asked the sweetest girl on earth to marry me, I have. And I'm the happiest man on the footstool, too. Good Heaven, George," he broke out, "if you knew the meaning of love!

if you could for one second catch a glimpse of the beauty of her soul! Why, man of sordid clay that I was—creature of club and claret and turtle—like you——"

"Drop it!" said Wayne somberly.

"I can't help it, George. We were beasts—and *you* are yet. But my base clay is transmuted, spiritualized; my soul is awake, traveling, toiling toward the upward heights where hers sits enthroned. When I think of what I was, and what you still are——"

Wayne rose exasperated:

"Do you think your soul is doing the only upward hustling?" he said hotly.

Briggs, clasping his flowers to his breast, gazed out over them at Wayne.

"You don't mean——"

"Yes, I do," said Wayne. "I may be crazy, but I know something," with which paradox he turned on his heel and walked into the moonlit meadow toward that dim, white form moving through the dusk.

"I wondered," she said, "whether you were coming," as he stepped through the long, fragrant grass to her side.

"You might have wondered if I had not come," he answered.

"Yes, that is true. This moonlight is too wonderful to miss," she added without a trace of self-consciousness.

"It was for you I came."

"Couldn't you find my sisters?" she asked innocently.

He did not reply. Presently she stumbled over a hummock, recovered her poise without comment, and slipped her hand into his with unconscious confidence.

"Do you know what I have been studying to-day?" she asked.

"What?"

"That curious phycomycetous fungus that produces resting-spores by the conjugation of two similar club-shaped hyphæ, and in which conidia also occur. It's fascinating."

After a silence he said:

"What would you think of me if I told you that I do not comprehend a single word of what you have just told me?"

"Don't you?" she asked, astonished.

"No," he replied, dropping her hand. She wondered, vaguely distressed; and he went on presently: "As a plain matter of fact, I don't know much. It's an astonishing discovery for me, but it's a fact that I am not

your mental, physical, or spiritual equal. In sheer, brute strength perhaps I am, and I am none too certain of that, either. But, and I say it to my shame, I can not follow you; I am inferior in education, in culture, in fine instinct, in mental development. You chatter in a dozen languages to your sisters: my French appals a Paris cabman; you play any instrument I ever heard of: the guitar is my limit, the fandango my repertoire. As for alert intelligence, artistic comprehension, ability to appreciate, I can not make the running with you; I am outclassed—hopelessly. Now, if this is all true—and I have spoken the wretched truth—*what* can a man like me have to say for himself?"

Her head was bent, her fair face was in shadow. She strayed on a little way, then, finding herself alone, turned and looked back at him where he stood. For a moment they remained motionless, looking at one another, then, as on some sweet impulse, she came back hastily and looked into his eyes.

"I do not feel as you do," she said; "you are very—good—company. I am not all you say; I know very little. Listen. It—it dis-

tresses me to have you think I hold you—lightly. Truly we are *not* apart."

"There is but one thing that can join us."

"What is that?"

"Love."

Her pure gaze did not falter nor her eyes droop. Curiously regarding him, she seemed immersed in the solution of the problem as he had solved it.

"Do you love me?" she asked.

"With all my soul—such as it is, with all my heart, with every thought, every instinct, every breath I draw."

She considered him with fearless eyes; the beauty of them was all he could endure.

"You love me?" she repeated.

He bent his head, incapable of speech.

"You wish me to love you?"

He looked at her, utterly unable to move his lips.

"*How* do you wish me to love you?"

He opened his arms; she stepped forward, close to him.

Then their lips met.

"Oh," she said faintly, "I did not know it—it was so sweet."

And as her head fell back on his arm about

her neck she looked up at him full of wonder at this new knowledge he had taught her, marvelous, unsuspected, divine in its simplicity. Then the first delicate blush that ever mounted her face spread, tinting throat and forehead; she drew his face down to her own.

. . . . . .

The poet paced the dim veranda, arms folded, head bent. But his glance was sideways and full of intelligence as it included two vague figures coming slowly back through the moon-drenched meadow.

"By elimination we arrive at perfection," he mused; "and perfection is success. There remain six more," he added irrelevantly, "but they're young yet. Patience, subtle patience —and attention to the little things." He pinched a morsel of air out of the darkness, examined it and released it.

"The little things," he repeated; "that is a very precious thought. . . . I believe the sea air may agree with me—now and then."

And he wandered off into his "den" and unlocked a drawer in his desk, and took out a bundle of legal papers, and tore them slowly, carefully, into very small pieces.

V

THE double wedding at the Church of Sainte Cicindella was pretty and sufficiently fashionable to inconvenience traffic on Fifth Avenue. Partly from loyalty, partly from curiosity, the clans of Wayne and Briggs, with their offshoots and social adherents, attended; and they saw Briggs and Wayne on their best behavior, attended by Sudbury Grey and Winsted Forest; and they saw two bridal visions of loveliness, attended by six additional sister visions as bridesmaids; and they saw the poet, agitated with the holy emotions of a father, now almost unmanned, now rallying, spraying

the hushed air with sweetness. They saw clergymen and a bishop, and the splendor of stained glass through which ushers tiptoed. And they heard the subdued rustling of skirts and the silken stir, and the great organ breathing over Eden, and a single artistically-modulated sob from the poet. A good many other things they heard and saw, especially those of the two clans who were bidden to the breakfast at Wayne's big and splendid house on the southwest corner of Seventy-ninth Street and Madison Avenue.

For here they were piped to breakfast by the boatswain of Wayne's big seagoing yacht, the *Thendara*—on which brides and grooms were presently to embark for Cairo via the Azores—and speeches were said and tears shed into goblets glimmering with vintages worth prayerful consideration.

And in due time two broughams, drawn by dancing horses, with the azure ribbons aflutter from the head-stalls, bore away two very beautiful and excited brides and two determined, but entirely rattled, grooms. And after that several relays of parents fraternized with the poet and six daughters, and the clans of Briggs and of Wayne said a number of agree-

able things to anybody who cared to listen; and as everybody did listen, there was a great deal of talk—more talk in a minute than the sisters of Iole had heard in all their several limited and innocently natural existences. So it confused them, not with its quality, but its profusion; and the champagne made their cheeks feel as though the soft peachy skin fitted too tight, and a number of persistent musical instruments were being tuned in their little ears; and, not yet thoroughly habituated to any garments except pink sunbonnets and pajamas, their straight fronts felt too tight, and the tops of their stockings pulled, and they balanced badly on their high heels, and Aphrodite and Cybele, being too snugly laced, retired to rid themselves of their first corsets.

The remaining four, Lissa, now eighteen; Dione, fifteen; Philodice, fourteen, and Chlorippe, thirteen, found the missing Pleiads in the great library, joyously donning their rose-silk lounging pajamas, while two parlor maids brought ices from the wrecked feast below.

So they, too, flung from them crinkling silk and diaphanous lace, high-heel shoon and the delicate body-harness never fashioned for free-limbed dryads of the Rose-Cross wilds;

and they kept the electric signals going for ices and fruits and pitchers brimming with clear cold water; and they sat there in a circle like a thicket of fluttering pale-pink roses, until below the last guest had sped out into the unknown wastes of Gotham, and the poet's heavy step was on the stair.

The poet was agitated—and like a humble bicolored quadruped of the Rose-Cross wilds, which, when agitated, sprays the air—so the poet, laboring obesely under his emotion, smiled with a sweetness so intolerable that the air seemed to be squirted full of saccharinity to the point of plethoric saturation.

"My lambs," he murmured, fat hands clasped and dropped before him as straight as his rounded abdomen would permit; "my babes!"

"Do you think," suggested Aphrodite, busy with her ice, "that we are going to enjoy this winter in Mr. Wayne's house?"

"Enjoyment," breathed the poet in an overwhelming gush of sweetness, "is not in houses; it is in one's soul. What is wealth? Everything! Therefore it is of no value. What is poverty? Nothing! And, as it is the little things that are the most precious,

so nothing, which is less than the very least, is precious beyond price. Thank you for listening; thank you for understanding. Bless you."

And he wandered away, almost asphyxiated with his emotions.

"I mean to have a gay winter—if I can ever get used to being laced in and pulled over by those dreadful garters," observed Aphrodite, stretching her smooth young limbs in comfort.

"I suppose there would be trouble if we wore our country clothes on Broadway, wouldn't there?" asked Lissa wistfully.

Chlorippe, aged thirteen, kicked off her sandals and stretched her pretty snowy feet: "They were never in the world made to fit into high-heeled shoes," she declared pensively, widening her little rosy toes.

"But we might as well get used to all these things," sighed Philodice, rolling over among the cushions, a bunch of hothouse grapes suspended above her pink mouth. She ate one, looked at Dione, and yawned.

"I'm going to practise wearing 'em an hour a day," said Aphrodite, "because I mean to go to the theater. It's worth the effort. Be-

sides, if we just sit here in the house all day asking each other Greek riddles, we will never see anybody until Iole and Vanessa come back from their honeymoon and give teas and dinners for all sorts of interesting young men."

"Oh, the attractive young men I have seen in these few days in New York!" exclaimed Lissa. "Would you believe it, the first day I walked out with George Wayne and Iole, I was perfectly bewildered and enchanted to see so many delightful-looking men. And by and by Iole missed me, and George came back and found me standing entranced on the corner of Fifth Avenue; and I said, 'Please don't disturb me, George, because I am only standing here to enjoy the sight of so many agreeable-looking men.' But he acted so queerly about it." She ended with a little sigh. "However, I love George, of course, even if he does bore me. I wonder where they are now—the bridal pairs?"

"I wonder," mused Philodice, "whether they have any children by this time?"

"Not yet," explained Aphrodite. "But they'll probably have some when they return. I understand it takes a good many weeks to —to——"

"To find new children," nodded Chlorippe confidently. "I suppose they've hidden the cunning little things somewhere on the yacht, and it's like hunt the thimble and lots and lots of fun." And she distributed six oranges.

Lissa was not so certain of that, but, discussing the idea with Cybele, and arriving at no conclusion, devoted herself to the large juicy orange with more satisfaction, conscious that the winter's outlook was bright for them all and full of the charming mystery of anticipations so glittering yet so general that she could form not even the haziest ideas of their wonderful promise. And so, sucking the sunlit pulp of their oranges, they were content to live, dream, and await fulfilment under the full favor of a Heaven which had never yet sent them aught but happiness beneath the sun.

VI

NEITHER Lethbridge nor Harrow —lately exceedingly important undergraduates at Harvard and now twin nobodies in the employment of the great Occidental Fidelity and Trust Company—neither of these young men, I say, had any particular business at the New Arts Theater that afternoon.

For the play was Barnard Haw's *Attitudes,* the performance was private and intensely intellectual, the admission by invitation only, and between the acts there was supposed to be a general *causerie* among the gifted individuals of the audience.

Why Stanley West, president of the Occi-

dental Trust, should have presented to his two young kinsmen the tickets inscribed with his own name was a problem, unless everybody else, including the elevator boys, had politely declined the offer.

"That's probably the case," observed Lethbridge. "Do we go?"

"Art," said Harrow, "will be on the loose among that audience. And if anybody can speak to anybody there, we'll get spoken to just as if we were sitting for company, and first we know somebody will ask us what Art really is."

"I'd like to see a place full of atmosphere," suggested Lethbridge. "I've seen almost everything—the Café Jaune, and Chinatown, and—you remember that joint at Tangier? But I've never seen atmosphere. I don't care how thin it is; I just want to say that I've seen it when the next girl throws it all over me." And as Harrow remained timid, he added: "We won't have to climb across the footlights and steal a curl from the author, because he's already being sheared in England. There's nothing to scare you."

Normally, however, they were intensely afraid of Art except at their barbers', and

they had heard, in various ways as vague as Broad Street rumors, something concerning these gatherings of the elect at the New Arts Theater on Saturday afternoons, where unselfish reformers produced plays for Art's sake as a rebuke to managers who declined to produce that sort of play for anybody's sake.

"I'll bet," said Harrow, "that some thrifty genius sent Stanley West those tickets in a desperate endeavor to amalgamate the aristocracies of wealth and intellect!—as though you could shake 'em up as you shake a cocktail! As though you'd catch your Uncle Stanley wearing his richest Burgundy flush, sitting in the orchestra and talking *Arr Nooyo* to a young thing with cheek-bones who'd pinch him into a cocked hat for a contribution between the acts!"

"Still," said Lethbridge, "even Art requires a wad to pay its license. Isn't West the foxy Freddie! Do you suppose, if we go, they'll sting us for ten?"

"They'll probably take up a collection for the professor," said Harrow gloomily. "Better come to the club and give the tickets to the janitor."

"Oh, that's putting it all over Art! If any-

body with earnest eyes tries to speak to us we can call a policeman."

"Well," said Harrow, "on your promise to keep your mouth shut I'll go with you. If you open it they'll discover you're an appraiser and I'm a broker, and then they'll think we're wealthy, because there'd be no other reason for our being there, and they'll touch us both for a brace of come-ons, and——"

"Perhaps," interrupted the other, "we'll be fortunate enough to sit next to a peach! And as it's the proper thing there to talk to your neighbor, the prospect—er—needn't jar you."

There was a silence as they walked up-town, which lasted until they entered their lodgings. And by that time they had concluded to go.

VII

SO they went, having nothing better on hand, and at two o'clock they sidled into the squatty little theater, shyly sought their reserved seats and sat very still, abashed in the presence of the massed intellects of Manhattan.

When Clarence Guilford, the Poet of Simplicity, followed by six healthy, vigorous young daughters, entered the middle aisle of the New Arts Theater, a number of people whispered in reverent recognition: "Guilford, the poet! Those are his daughters. They

wear nothing but pink pajamas at home. Sh-sh-h-h!"

Perhaps the poet heard, for he heard a great deal when absent-minded. He paused; his six tall and blooming daughters, two and two behind him, very naturally paused also, because the poet was bulky and the aisle narrow.

Those of the elect who had recognized him had now an opportunity to view him at close range; young women with expressive eyes leaned forward, quivering; several earnest young men put up lorgnettes.

It was as it should have been; and the poet stood motionless in dreamy abstraction, until an usher took his coupons and turned down seven seats. Then the six daughters filed in, and the poet, slowly turning to survey the house, started slightly, as though surprised to find himself under public scrutiny, passed a large, plump hand over his forehead, and slowly subsided into the aisle-seat with a smile of whimsical acquiescence in the knowledge of his own greatness.

"Who," inquired young Harrow, turning toward Lethbridge—"who is that duck?"

"You can search me," replied Lethbridge in a low voice, "but for Heaven's sake *look*

is above Art, but Art is never below Art. Art, to be Art, must be artless. That is a very precious thought—very, very precious. Thank you for understanding me—thank you." And he included in his large smile young Harrow, who had been unconsciously bending forward, hypnotized by the monotonous resonance of the poet's deep, rich voice.

Now that the spell was broken, he sank back in his chair, looking at Lethbridge a little wildly.

"Let me sit next—after the first act," began Lethbridge, coaxing; "they'll be watching the stage all the first act and you can look at 'em without being rude, and they'll do the same next act, and I can look at 'em, and perhaps they'll ask us what Art really is——"

"Did you hear what that man said?" interrupted Harrow, recovering his voice. "*Did* you?"

"No; what?"

"Well, listen next time. And all I have to say is, if that firing-line, with its battery of innocent blue eyes, understands him, you and I had better apply to the nearest night-school for the rudiments of an education."

"Well, what did he say?" began the other

uneasily, when again the poet bent forward to address the firing-line; and the lovely blue battery turned silently upon the author of their being.

"Art is the result of a complex mental attitude capable of producing concrete simplicity."

"Help!" whispered Harrow, but the poet had caught his eye, and was fixing the young man with a smile that held him as syrup holds a fly.

"You ask me what is Art, young sir? Why should I not heed you? Why should I not answer you? What artificial barriers, falsely called convention, shall force me to ignore the mute eloquence of your questioning eyes? You ask me what is Art. I will tell you; it is *this!*" And the poet, inverting his thumb, pressed it into the air. Then, carefully inspecting the dent he had made in the atmosphere, he erased it with a gesture and folded his arms, looking gravely at Harrow, whose fascinated eyes protruded.

Behind him Lethbridge whispered hoarsely, "I told you how it would be in the New Arts Theater. I told you a young man alone was likely to get spoken to. Now those six girls know you're a broker!"

"Don't say it so loud," muttered Harrow savagely. "I'm all right so far, for I haven't said a word."

"You'd better not," returned the other. "I wish that curtain would go up and stay up. It will be my turn to sit next them after this act, you know."

Harrow ventured to glance at the superb young creature sitting beside him, and at the same instant she looked up and, catching his eye, smiled in the most innocently friendly fashion—the direct, clear-eyed advance of a child utterly unconscious of self.

"I have never before been in a theater," she said; "have you?"

"I—I beg your pardon," stammered Harrow when he found his voice, "but *were* you good enough to speak to *me?*"

"Why, yes!" she said, surprised but amiable; "shouldn't I have spoken to you?"

"Indeed—oh, indeed you should!" said Harrow hastily, with a quick glance at the poet. The poet, however, appeared to be immersed in thought, lids partially closed, a benignant smile imprinted on his heavy features.

"*What* are you doing?" breathed Lethbridge in his ear. Harrow calmly turned his

back on his closest friend and gazed rapturously at his goddess. And again her bewildering smile broke out and he fairly blinked in its glory.

"This is my first play," she said; "I'm a little excited. I hope I shall care for it."

"Haven't you ever seen a play?" asked Harrow, tenderly amazed.

"Never. You see, we always lived in the country, and we have always been poor until my sister Iole married. And now our father has come to live with his new son-in-law. So that is how we came to be here in New York."

"I am *so* glad you *did* come," said Harrow fervently.

"So are we. We have never before seen anything like a large city. We have never had enough money to see one. But now that Iole is married, everything is possible. It is all so interesting for us—particularly the clothing. Do you like my gown?"

"It is a dream!" stammered the infatuated youth.

"Do you think so? I think it is wonderful —but not very comfortable."

"Doesn't it fit?" he inquired.

"Perfectly; that's the trouble. It is not

comfortable. We never before were permitted to wear skirts and all sorts of pretty fluffy frills under them, and *such* high heels, and *such* long stockings, and *such* tight lacing—" She hesitated, then calmly: "But I believe father told us that we are not to mention our pretty underwear, though it's hard not to, as it's the first we ever had."

Harrow was past all speech.

"I wish I had my lounging-suit on," she said with a sigh and a hitch of her perfectly modeled shoulders.

"W—what sort of things do you usually dress in?" he ventured.

"Why, in dress-reform clothes!" she said, laughing. "We never have worn anything else."

"Bloomers!"

"I don't know; we had trousers and blouses and sandals—something like the pink pajamas we have for night-wear now. Formerly we wore nothing at night. I am beginning to wonder, from the way people look at us when we speak of this, whether we were odd. But all our lives we have never thought about clothing. However, I am glad you like my new gown, and I fancy I'll get used to this

tight lacing in time. . . . What is your name?"

"James Harrow," he managed to say, aware of an innocence and directness of thought and speech which were awaking in him faintest responsive echoes. They were the blessed echoes from the dim, fair land of childhood, but he did not know it.

"James Harrow," she repeated with a friendly nod. "My name is Lissa—my first name; the other is Guilford. My father is the famous poet, Clarence Guilford. He named us all after butterflies—all my sisters" —counting them on her white fingers while her eyes rested on him—"Chlorippe, twelve years old, that pretty one next to my father; then Philodice, thirteen; Dione, fourteen; Aphrodite, fifteen; Cybele, the one next to me, sixteen, and almost seventeen; and myself, seventeen, almost eighteen. Besides, there is Iole, who married Mr. Wayne, and Vanessa, married to Mr. Briggs. They have been off on Mr. Wayne's yacht, the *Thendara,* on their wedding trip. Now you know all about us. Do you think you would like to know us?"

"*Like* to! I'd simply love to! I——"

"That is very nice," she said unembarrassed.

"I thought I should like you when I saw you leaning over and listening so reverently to father's epigrams. Then, besides, I had nobody but my sisters to talk to. Oh, you can't imagine how many attractive men I see every day in New York—and I should like to know them all—and many *do* look at me as though they would like it, too; but Mr. Wayne is so queer, and so are father and Mr. Briggs—about my speaking to people in public places. They have told me not to, but I—I—thought I would," she ended, smiling. "What harm can it do for me to talk to you?"

"It's perfectly heavenly of you——"

"Oh, do you think so? I wonder what father thinks"—turning to look; then, resuming: "He generally makes us stop, but I am quite sure he expected me to talk to you."

The lone note of a piano broke the thread of the sweetest, maddest discourse Harrow had ever listened to; the girl's cheeks flushed and she turned expectantly toward the curtained stage. Again the lone note, thumped vigorously, sounded a stacatto monotone.

"Precious—very precious," breathed the poet, closing his eyes in a sort of fatty ecstasy.

VIII

NARROW looked at his program, then, leaning toward Lissa, whispered: "That is the overture to *Attitudes*—the program explains it: 'A series of pale gray notes'—what the deuce!—'pale *gray* notes giving the value of the highest light in which the play is pitched'—" He paused, aghast.

"I understand," whispered the girl, resting her lovely arm on the chair beside him. "Look! The curtain is rising! *How* my heart beats! Does yours?"

He nodded, unable to articulate.

The curtain rose very, very slowly, upon the first scene of Barnard Haw's masterpiece of satire; and the lovely firing-line quivered, blue

batteries opening very wide, lips half parted in breathless anticipation. And about that time Harrow almost expired as a soft, impulsive hand closed nervously over his.

And there, upon the stage, the human species was delicately vivisected in one act; human frailty exposed, human motives detected, human desire quenched in all the brilliancy of perverted epigram and the scalpel analysis of the astigmatic. Life, love, and folly were portrayed with the remorseless accuracy of an eye doubly sensitive through the stimulus of an intellectual strabismus. Barnard Haw at his greatest! And how he dissected attitudes; the attitude assumed by the lover, the father, the wife, the daughter, the mother, the mistress—proving that virtue, *per se,* is a pose. Attitudes! How he flayed those who assumed them. His attitude toward attitudes was remorseless, uncompromising, inexorable.

And the curtain fell on the first act, its gray and silver folds swaying in the half-crazed whirlwind of applause.

Lissa's silky hand trembled in Harrow's, her grasp relaxed. He dropped his hand and, searching, encountered hers again.

"*What* do you think of it?" she asked.

"I don't think there's any harm in it," he stammered guiltily, supposing she meant the contact of their interlaced fingers.

"Harm? I didn't mean harm," she said. "The play is perfectly harmless, I think."

"Oh—the play! Oh, that's just *that* sort of play, you know. They're all alike; a lot of people go about telling each other how black white is and that white is always black—until somebody suddenly discovers that black and white are a sort of greenish red. Then the audience applauds frantically in spite of the fact that everybody in it had concluded that black and white were really a shade of yellowish yellow!"

She had begun to laugh; and as he proceeded, excited by her approval, the most adorable gaiety possessed her.

"I *never* heard anything half so clever!" she said, leaning toward him.

"I? Clever!" he faltered. "You—you don't really mean that!"

"Why? Don't you know you are? Don't you know in your heart that you have said the very thing that I in my heart found no words to explain?"

"Did I, really?"

"Yes. Isn't it delightful!"

It was; Harrow, holding tightly to the soft little hand half hidden by the folds of her gown, cast a sneaking look behind him, and encountered the fixed and furious glare of his closest friend, who had pinched him.

"Pig!" hissed Lethbridge, "do I sit next or not?"

"I—I can't; I'll explain——"

"*Do* I?"

"You don't understand——"

"I understand *you!*"

"No, you don't. Lissa and I——"

"Lissa!"

"Ya—as! We're talking very cleverly; *I* am, too. Wha'd'you wan' to butt in for?" with sudden venom.

"Butt in! Do you think I want to sit here and look at tha' damfool play! Fix it or I'll run about biting!"

Harrow turned. "Lissa," he whispered in an exquisitely modulated voice, "what would happen if I spoke to your sister Cybele?"

"Why, she'd answer you, silly!" said the girl, laughing. "Wouldn't you, Cybele?"

"I'll tell you what I'd like to do," said Cy-

bele, leaning forward: "I'd like very much to talk to that attractive man who is trying to look at me—only your head has been in the way." And she smiled innocently at Lethbridge.

So Lissa moved down one. Harrow took her seat, and Cybele dropped gaily into Harrow's vacant place.

"*Now,*" she said to Lethbridge, "we can tell each other all sorts of things. I was so glad that you looked at me all the while and so vexed that I couldn't talk to you. *How* do you like my new gown? And what is your name? Have you ever before seen a play? I haven't, and my name is Cybele."

"It is per—perfectly heavenly to hear you talk," stammered Lethbridge.

Harrow heard him, turned and looked him full in the eyes, then slowly resumed his attitude of attention: for the poet was speaking:

"The Art of Barnard Haw is the quintessence of simplicity. What is the quintessence of simplicity?" He lifted one heavy pudgy hand, joined the tips of his soft thumb and forefinger, and selecting an atom of air, deftly

captured it. "*That* is the quintessence of simplicity; *that* is Art!"

He smiled largely on Harrow, whose eyes had become wild again.

"*That!*" he repeated, pinching out another molecule of atmosphere, "and *that!*" punching dent after dent in the viewless void with inverted thumb.

On the hapless youth the overpowering sweetness of his smile acted like an anesthetic; he saw things waver, even wabble; and his hidden clutch on Lissa's fingers tightened spasmodically.

"Thank you," said the poet, leaning forward to fix the young man with his heavy-lidded eyes. "Thank you for the precious thoughts you inspire in me. Bless you. Our mental and esthetic commune has been very precious to me—very, very precious," he mooned bulkily, his rich voice dying to a resonant, soothing drone.

Lissa turned to the petrified young man. "Please be clever some more," she whispered. "You were so perfectly delightful about this play."

"Child!" he groaned, "I have scarcely sufficient intellect to keep me overnight. You

must know that I haven't understood one single thing your father has been kind enough to say."

"What didn't you understand?" she asked, surprised.

"'*That!*'" He flourished his thumb. "What does '*That!*' mean?"

"Oh, that is only a trick father has caught from painters who tell you how they're going to use their brushes. But the truth is I've usually noticed that they do most of their work in the air with their thumbs. . . . What else did you not understand?"

"Oh—Art!" he said wearily. "What is it? Or, as Barnard Haw, the higher exponent of the Webberfield philosophy, might say: 'What it iss? Yess?'"

"I don't know what the Webberfield philosophy is," said Lissa innocently, "but Art is only things one believes. And it's awfully hard, too, because nobody sees the same thing in the same way, or believes the same things that others believe. So there are all kinds of Art. I think the only way to be sure is when the artist makes himself and his audience happier; then that is Art. . . . But one need not use one's thumb, you know."

"The—the way you make me happy? Is *that* Art?"

"Do I?" she laughed. "Perhaps; for I am happy, too—far, far happier than when I read the works of Henry Haynes. And Henry Haynes *is* Art. Oh, dear!"

But Harrow knew nothing of the intellectual obstetrics which produced that great master's monotypes.

"Have you read Double or Quits?" he ventured shyly. "It's a humming Wall Street story showing up the entire bunch and exposing the trading-stamp swindle of the great department stores. The heroine is a detective and—" She was looking at him so intently that he feared he had said something he shouldn't. "But I don't suppose that would interest you," he muttered, ashamed.

"It does! It is *new!* I—I never read that sort of a novel. Tell me!"

"Are you serious?"

"Of course. It is perfectly wonderful to think of a heroine being a detective."

"Oh, she's a dream!" he said with cautious enthusiasm. "She falls in love with the worst stock-washer in Wall Street, and pushes him off a ferry-boat when she finds he has cornered

the trading-stamp market and is bankrupting her father, who is president of the department store trust——"

"Go on!" she whispered breathlessly.

"I will, but——"

"What is it? Oh—is it my hand you are looking for? Here it is; I only wanted to smooth my hair a moment. Now tell me; for I never, never knew that such books were written. The books my father permits us to read are not concerned with all those vital episodes of every-day life. Nobody ever *does* anything in the few novels I am allowed to read—except, once, in *Cranford*, somebody gets up out of a chair in one chapter—but sits down again in the next," she added wearily.

"*I'll* send you something to make anybody sit up and stay up," he said indignantly. "Baffles, the Gent Burglar; Love Militant, by Nora Norris Newman; The Crown-Snatcher, by Reginald Rodman Roony—oh, it's simply ghastly to think of what you've missed! This is the Victorian era; you have a right to be fully cognizant of the great literary movements of the twentieth century!"

"I love to hear you say such things," she said, her beautiful face afire. "I desire to be

modern—intensely, humanly modern. All my life I have been nourished on the classics of ages dead; the literature of the Orient, of Asia, of Europe I am familiar with; the literature of England—as far as Andrew Bang's boyhood verses. I—all my sisters—read, write, speak, even think, in ten languages. I long for something to read which is vital, familiar, friendly—something of my own time, my own day. I wish to know what young people do and dare; what they really think, what they believe, strive for, desire!"

"Well—well, I don't think people really do and say and think the things that you read in interesting modern novels," he said doubtfully. "Fact is, only the tiresome novels seem to tell a portion of the truth; but they end by overdoing it and leave you yawning with a nasty taste in your mouth. I—I think you'd better let your father pick out your novels."

"I don't want to," she said rebelliously. "I want *you* to."

He looked at the beautiful, rebellious face and took a closer hold on the hidden hand.

"I wish you—I wish I could choose—everything for you," he said unsteadily.

"I wish so, too. You are exactly the sort of man I like."

"Do—do you mean it?"

"Why, yes," she replied, opening her splendid eyes. "Don't I show the pleasure I take in being with you?"

"But—would you tire of me if—if we always—forever——"

"Were friends? No."

"Mo-u-m-more than friends?" Then he choked.

The speculation in her wide eyes deepened. "What do you mean?" she asked curiously.

But again the lone note of the thumped piano signaled silence. In the sudden hush the poet opened his lids with a sticky smile and folded his hands over his abdomen, plump thumbs joined.

"*What* do you mean?" repeated Lissa hurriedly, tightening her slender fingers around Harrow's.

"I mean—I mean——"

He turned in silence and their eyes met. A moment later her fingers relaxed limply in his; their hands were still in contact but scarcely so; and so remained while the *Attitudes* of Barnard Haw held the stage.

IX

THERE was a young wife behind the footlights explaining to a young man who was not her husband that her marriage vows need not be too seriously considered if he, the young man, found them too inconvenient. Which scared the young man, who was plainly a purveyor of heated air and a short sport. And, although she explained very clearly that if he needed her in his business he had better say so quick, the author's invention gave out just there and he called in the young wife's husband to help him out.

And all the while the battery of round blue

eyes gazed on unwinking; the poet's dewlaps quivered with stored emotion, and the spell-bound audience breathed as people breathe when the hostess at table attempts to smooth over a bad break by her husband.

"Is *that* life?" whispered Cybele to Lethbridge, her sensitive mouth aquiver. "Did the author actually know such people? Do *you?* Is conscience really only an attitude? Is instinct the only guide? Am *I*—really—bad——"

"No, no," whispered Lethbridge; "all that is only a dramatist's attitude. Don't—don't look grieved! Why, every now and then some man discovers he can attract more attention by standing on his head. That is all—really, that is all. Barnard Haw on his feet is not amusing; but the same gentleman on his head is worth an orchestra-chair. When a man wears his trousers where other men wear their coats, people are bound to turn around. It is not a new trick. Mystes, the Argive comic poet, and the White Queen, taught this author the value of substituting 'is' for 'is not,' until, from standing so long inverted, he himself forgets what he means, and at this point the eminent brothers Rogers take up the important work.

. . . Please, please, Cybele, *don't* take it seriously! . . . If you look that way—if you are unhappy, I—I——"

A gentle snore from the poet transfixed the firing-line, but the snore woke up the poet and he mechanically pinched an atom out of the atmosphere, blinking at the stage.

"Precious—very, very precious," he murmured drowsily. "Thank you—thank everybody—" And he sank into an obese and noiseless slumber as the gray and silver curtain slowly fell. The applause, far from rousing him, merely soothed him; a honeyed smile hovered on his lips which formed the words "Thank you." That was all; the firing-line stirred, breathed deeply, and folded twelve soft white hands. Chlorippe, twelve, and Philodice, thirteen, yawned, pink-mouthed, sleepy-eyed; Dione, fourteen, laid her golden head on the shoulder of Aphrodite, fifteen.

The finger-tips of Lissa and Harrow still touched, scarcely clinging; they had turned toward one another when the curtain fell. But the play, to them, had been a pantomime of silhouettes, the stage, a void edged with flame —the scene, the audience, the theater, the poet himself as unreal and meaningless as the shad-

owy attitudes of the shapes that vanished when the phantom curtain closed its folds.

And through the subdued light, turning noiselessly, they peered at one another, conscious that naught else was real in the misty, golden-tinted gloom; that they were alone together there in a formless, soundless chaos peopled by shapes impalpable as dreams.

"*Now* tell me," she said, her lips scarcely moving as the soft voice stirred them like carmine petals stirring in a scented breeze.

"Tell you that it is—love?"

"Yes, tell me."

"That I love you, Lissa?"

"Yes; that!"

He stooped nearer; his voice was steady and very low, and she leaned with bent head to listen, clear-eyed, intelligent, absorbed.

"So *that* is love—what you tell me?"

"Yes—partly."

"And the other part?"

"The other part is when you find you love me."

"I—do. I think it must be love, because I can't bear to have you go away. Besides, I wish you to tell me—things."

"Ask me."

"Well—when two—like you and me, begin to love—what happens?"

"We confess it——"

"I do; I'm not ashamed. . . . Should I be? And then?"

"Then?" he faltered.

"Yes; do we kiss? . . . For I am curious to have you do it—I am so certain I shall adore you when you do. . . . I wish we could go away somewhere together. . . . But we can't do that until I am a bride, can we? Oh—do you really want me?"

"Can you ask?" he breathed.

"Ask? Yes—yes. . . . I love to ask! Your hand thrills me. We can't go away now, can we? It took Iole so long to be permitted to go away with Mr. Wayne—all that time lost in so many foolish ways—when a girl is so impatient. . . . Is it not strange how my heart beats when I look into your eyes? Oh, there can be no doubt about it, I am dreadfully in love. . . . And so quickly, too. I suppose it's because I am in such splendid health; don't you?"

"I—I—well——"

"Oh, I *do* want to get up at once and go

away with you! *Can't* we? I could explain to father."

"Wait!" he gasped, "he—he's asleep. Don't speak—don't touch him."

"How unselfish you are," she breathed. "No, you are not hurting my fingers. Tell me more—about love and the blessed years awaiting us, and about our children—oh, is it not wonderful!"

"Ex—extremely," he managed to mutter, touching his suddenly dampened forehead with his handkerchief, and attempting to set his thoughts in some sort of order. He could not; the incoherence held him speechless, dazed, under the magic of this superb young being instinct with the soft fire of life.

Her loveliness, her innocence, the beautiful, direct gaze, the childlike fulness of mouth and contour of cheek and throat, left him spellbound. The very air around them seemed suffused with the vital glow of her youth and beauty; each breath they drew increased their wonder, till the whole rosy universe seemed thrilling and singing at their feet, and they two, love-crowned, alone, saw Time and Eternity flowing like a golden tide under the spell of Paradise.

"Jim!"

The hoarse whisper of Lethbridge shook the vision from him; he turned a flushed countenance to his friend; but Cybele spoke:

"We are very tired sitting here. We would like to take some tea at Sherry's," she whispered. "What do you think we had better do? It seems so--so futile to sit here—when we wish to be alone together——"

"You and Henry, too!" gasped Harrow.

"Yes; do you wonder?" She leaned swiftly in front of him; a fragrant breeze stirred his hair. "Lissa, I'm desperately infatuated with Mr. Lethbridge. Do you see any use in our staying here when I'm simply dying to have him all to myself somewhere?"

"No, it is silly. I wish to go, too. Shall we?"

"You need not go," began Cybele; then stopped, aware of the new magic in her sister's eyes. "Lissa! Lissa!" she said softly. "*You,* too! Oh, my dear—my dearest!"

"Dear, is it not heavenly? I—I—was quite sure that if I ever had a good chance to talk to a man I really liked something would happen. And it has."

"If Philodice might awaken father perhaps he would let us go now," whispered Cybele.

"Henry says it does not take more than an hour——"

"To become a bride?"

"Yes; he knows a clergyman very near ——"

"Do you?" inquired Lissa. Lethbridge nodded and gave a scared glance at Harrow, who returned it as though stunned.

"But—but," muttered the latter, "your father doesn't know who we are——"

"Oh, yes, he does," said Cybele calmly, "for he sent you the tickets and placed us near you so that if we found that we liked you we might talk to you——"

"Only he made a mistake in your name," added Lissa to Harrow, "for he wrote 'Stanley West, Esq.' on the envelope. I know because I mailed it."

"Invited West—put *you* where you could—good God!"

"What is the matter?" whispered Lissa in consternation; "have—have I said anything I should not?" And, as he was silent: "What is it? Have I hurt you—I who——"

There was a silence; she looked him through and through and, after a while, deep, deep in his soul, she saw, awaking once again, all he

had deemed dead—the truth, the fearless reason, the sweet and faultless instinct of the child whose childhood had become a memory. Then, once more spiritually equal, they smiled at one another; and Lissa, pausing to gather up her ermine stole, passed noiselessly out to the aisle, where she stood, perfectly self-possessed, while her sister joined her, smiling vaguely down at the firing-line and their lifted battery of blue, inquiring eyes.

The poet—and whether he had slumbered or not nobody but himself is qualified to judge—the poet pensively opened one eye and peeped at Harrow as that young man bent beside him with Lethbridge at his elbow.

"In sending those two tickets you have taught us a new creed," whispered Harrow; "you have taught us innocence and simplicity—you have taught us to be ourselves, to scorn convention, to say and do what we believe. Thank you."

"Dear friend," said the poet in an artistically-modulated whisper, "I have long, long followed you in the high course of your career. To me the priceless simplicity of poverty: to you the responsibility for millions. To me the daisy, the mountain stream, the woodchuck

and my Art! To you the busy mart, the haunts of men, the ship of finance laden with a nation's wealth, the awful burden of millions for which you are answerable to One higher!" He raised one soft, solemn finger.

The young men gazed at one another, astounded. Lethbridge's startled eyes said, "He still takes you for Stanley West!"

"Let him!" flashed the grim answer back from the narrowing gaze of Harrow.

"Daughters," whispered the poet playfully, "are you so soon tired of the brilliant gems of satire which our master dramatist scatters with a lavish——"

"No," said Cybele; "we are only very much in love."

The poet sat up briskly and looked hard at Harrow.

"Your—your friend?" he began—"doubtless associated with you in the high——"

"We are inseparable," said Harrow calmly, "in the busy marts."

The sweetness of the poet's smile was almost overpowering.

"To discuss this sudden—ah—condition which so—ah—abruptly confronts a father, I can not welcome you to my little home in the

wild—which I call the House Beautiful," he said. "I would it were possible. There all is quiet and simple and exquisitely humble—though now, through the grace of my valued son, there is no mortgage hanging like the brand of Damocles above our lowly roof. But I bid you welcome in the name of my son-in-law, on whom—I should say, *with* whom—I and my babes are sojourning in this clamorous city. Come and let us talk, soul to soul, heart to heart; come and partake of what simples we have. Set the day, the hour. I thank you for understanding me.'"

"The hour," replied Harrow, "will be about five P. M. on Monday afternoon. . . . You see, we are going out now to—to——"

"To marry each other," whispered Lissa with all her sweet fearlessness. "Oh, dear! there goes that monotonous piano and we'll be blocking people's view!"

The poet tried to rise upon his great flat feet, but he was wedged too tightly; he strove to speak, to call after them, but the loud thumping notes of the piano drowned his voice.

"Chlorippe! Dione! Philodice! Tell them to stop! Run after them and stay them!" panted the poet.

"*You* go!" pouted Dione.

"No, I don't want to," explained Chlorippe, "because the curtain is rising."

"I'll go," sighed Philodice, rising to her slender height and moving up the aisle as the children of queens moved once upon a time. She came back presently, saying: "Dear me, they're dreadfully in love, and they have driven away in two hansoms."

"Gone!" wheezed the poet.

"Quite," said Philodice, staring at the stage and calmly folding her smooth little hands.

X

WHEN the curtain at last descended upon the parting attitudes of the players the poet arose with an alacrity scarcely to be expected in a gentleman of his proportions. Two and two his big, healthy daughters—there remained but four now—followed him to the lobby. When he was able to pack all four into a cab he did so and sent them home without ceremony; then, summoning another vehicle, gave the driver the directions and climbed in.

Half an hour later he was deposited under the bronze shelter of the porte-cochère belong-

ing to an extremely expensive mansion overlooking the park; and presently, admitted, he prowled ponderously and softly about an overgilded rococo reception-room. But all anxiety had now fled from his face; he coyly nipped the atmosphere at intervals as various portions of the furniture attracted his approval; he stood before a splendid canvas of Goya and pushed his thumb at it; he moused and prowled and peeped and snooped, and his smile grew larger and larger and sweeter and sweeter, until—dare I say it!—a low smooth chuckle, all but noiseless, rippled the heavy cheeks of the poet; and, raising his eyes, he beheld a stocky, fashionably-dressed and red-faced man of forty intently eying him. The man spoke decisively and at once:

"Mr. Guilford? Quite so. I am Mr. West."

"You are—" The poet's smile flickered like a sickly candle. "I—this is—are you Mr. *Stanley* West?"

"I am."

"It must—it probably was your son——"

"I am unmarried," said the president of the Occidental tartly, "and the only Stanley West in the directory."

The poet swayed, then sat down rather suddenly on a Louis XIV chair which crackled. Several times he passed an ample hand over his features. A mechanical smile struggled to break out, but it was not *the* smile, any more than glucose is sugar.

"Did—ah—*did* you receive two tickets for the New Arts Theater—ah—Mr. West?" he managed to say at last.

"I did. Thank you very much, but I was not able to avail myself——"

"Quite so. And—ah—do you happen to know who it was that—ah—presented your tickets and occupied the seats this afternoon?"

"Why, I suppose it was two young men in our employ—Mr. Lethbridge, who appraises property for us, and Mr. Harrow, one of our brokers. May I ask why?"

For a long while the poet sat there, eyes squeezed tightly closed as though in bodily anguish. Then he opened one of them:

"They are—ah—quite penniless, I presume?"

"They have prospects," said West briefly. "Why?"

The poet rose; something of his old attitude

returned; he feebly gazed at a priceless Massero vase, made a half-hearted attempt to join thumb and forefinger, then rambled toward the door, where two spotless flunkies attended with his hat and overcoat.

"Mr. Guilford," said West, following, a trifle perplexed and remorseful, "I should be very—er—extremely happy to subscribe to the New Arts Theater—if that is what you wished."

"Thank you," said the poet absently as a footman invested him with a seal-lined coat.

"Is there anything more I could do for you, Mr. Guilford?"

The poet's abstracted gaze rested on him, then shifted.

"I—I don't feel very well," said the poet hoarsely, sitting down in a hall-seat. Suddenly he began to cry, fatly.

Nobody did anything; the stupefied footman gaped; West looked, walked nervously the length of the hall, looked again, and paced the inlaid floor to and fro, until the bell at the door sounded and a messenger-boy appeared with a note scribbled on a yellow telegraph blank:

"Lethbridge and I just married and madly happy. Will be on hand Monday, sure. Can't you advance us three months' salary?

"HARROW."

"Idiots!" said West. Then, looking up: "What are you waiting for, boy?"

"Me answer," replied the messenger calmly.

"Oh, you were told to bring back an answer?"

"Ya-as."

"Then give me your pencil, my infant Chesterfield." And West scribbled on the same yellow blank:

"Checks for you on your desks Monday. Congratulations. I'll see you through, you damfools. WEST."

"Here's a quarter for you," observed West, eying the messenger.

"T'anks. Gimme the note."

West glanced at the moist, fat poet; then suddenly that intuition which is bred in men of his stamp set him thinking. And presently he tentatively added two and two.

"Mr. Guilford," he said, "I wonder

whether this note—and my answer to it—concerns you."

The poet used his handkerchief, adjusted a pair of glasses, and blinked at the penciled scrawl. Twice he read it; then, like the full sun breaking through a drizzle—like the glory of a search-light dissolving a sticky fog, *the* smile of smiles illuminated everything: footmen, messenger, financier.

"Thank you," he said thickly; "thank you for your thought. Thought is but a trifle to bestow—a little thing in itself. But it is the little things that are most important—the smaller the thing the more vital its importance, until"—he added in a genuine burst of his old eloquence—"the thing becomes so small that it isn't anything at all, and then the value of nothing becomes so enormous that it is past all computation. That is a very precious thought! Thank you for it; thank you for understanding. Bless you!"

Exuding a rich sweetness from every feature the poet moved toward the door at a slow fleshy waddle, head wagging, small eyes half closed, thumbing the atmosphere, while his lips moved in wordless self-communion: "The attainment of nothing at all—that is rarest,

the most precious, the most priceless of triumphs—very, very precious. So"—and his glance was sideways and nimbly intelligent—"so if nothing at all is of such inestimable value, those two young pups can live on their expectations—*quod erat demonstrandum.*"

He shuddered and looked up at the façade of the gorgeous house which he had just quitted.

"So many sunny windows to sit in—to dream in. I—I should have found it agreeable. Pups!"

Crawling into his cab he sank into a pulpy mound, partially closing his eyes. And upon his pursed-up lips, unuttered yet imminent, a word trembled and wabbled as the cab bounced down the avenue. It may have been "precious"; it was probably "pups!"

XI

BUT there were further poignant emotions in store for the poet, for, as his cab swung out of the avenue and drew up before the great house on the southwest corner of Seventy-ninth Street and Madison Avenue, he caught a glimpse of his eldest daughter, Iole, vanishing into the house, and, at the same moment, he perceived his son-in-law, Mr. Wayne, paying the driver of a hansom-cab, while several liveried servants bore housewards the luggage of the wedding journey.

"George!" he cried dramatically, thrusting his head from the window of his own cab as that vehicle drew up with a jolt that made his stomach vibrate, "George! I am here!"

Wayne looked around, paid the hansom-driver, and, advancing slowly, offered his hand as the poet descended to the sidewalk. "How are you?" he inquired without enthusiasm as the poet evinced a desire to paw him. "All is well here, I hope."

"George! Son!" The poet gulped till his dewlap contracted. He laid a large plump hand on Wayne's shoulders. "Where are my lambs?" he quavered; "where are they?"

"Which lambs?" inquired the young man uneasily. "If you mean Iole and Vanessa——"

"No! My ravished lambs! Give me my stolen lambs. Trifle no longer with a father's affections! Lissa!—Cybele! Great Heavens! Where are they?" he sobbed hoarsely.

"Well, *where* are they?" retorted his son-in-law, horrified. "Come into the house; people in the street are looking."

In the broad hall the poet paused, staggered, strove to paw Wayne, then attempted to fold his arms in an attitude of bitter scorn.

"Two penniless wastrels," he muttered, "are wedded to my lambs. But there are laws to invoke——"

An avalanche of pretty girls in pink pa-

jamas came tumbling down the bronze and marble staircase, smothering poet and son-in-law in happy embraces; and "Oh, George!" they cried, "how sunburned you are! So is Iole, but she is too sweet! Did you have a perfectly lovely honeymoon? When is Vanessa coming? And how is Mr. Briggs? And—oh, do you know the news? Cybele and Lissa married two such extremely attractive young men this afternoon——"

"Married!" cried Wayne, releasing Dione's arms from his neck. "*Whom* did they marry?"

"Pups!" sniveled the poet—"penniless, wastrel pups!"

"Their names," said Aphrodite coolly, from the top of the staircase, "are James Harrow and Henry Lethbridge. I wish there had been three——"

"Harrow! Lethbridge!" gasped Wayne. "When"—he turned helplessly to the poet—"when did they do this?"

Through the gay babble of voices and amid cries and interruptions, Wayne managed to comprehend the story. He tried to speak, but everybody except the poet laughed and chatted, and the poet, suffused now with a sort of sad sweetness, waved his hand in slow

unctuous waves until even the footmen's eyes protruded.

"It's all right," said Wayne, raising his voice; "it's topsyturvy and irregular, but it's all right. I've known Harrow and Leth— For Heaven's sake, Dione, don't kiss me like that; I want to talk!—You're hugging me too hard, Philodice. Oh, Lord! *will* you stop chattering all together! I—I—*Do* you want the house to be pinched?"

He glanced up at Aphrodite, who sat astride the banisters lighting a cigarette. "Who taught you to do that?" he cried.

"I'm sixteen, now," she said coolly, "and I thought I'd try it."

Her voice was drowned in the cries and laughter; Wayne, with his hands to his ears, stared up at the piquant figure in its pink pajamas and sandals, then his distracted gaze swept the groups of parlor maids and footmen around the doors: "Great guns!" he thundered, "this is the limit and they'll pull the house! Morton!"—to a footman—"ring up 7—00—9B Murray Hill. My compliments and congratulations to Mr. Lethbridge and to Mr. Harrow, and say that we usually dine at eight! Philodice! stop that howling! Oh,

just you wait until Iole has a talk with you all for running about the house half-dressed——"

"I *won't* wear straight fronts indoors, and my garters hurt!" cried Aphrodite defiantly, preparing to slide down the banisters.

"Help!" said Wayne faintly, looking from Dione to Chlorippe, from Chlorippe to Philodice, from Philodice to Aphrodite. "I won't have my house turned into a confounded Art Nouveau music hall. I tell you——"

"Let *me* tell them," said Iole, laughing and kissing her hand to the poet as she descended the stairs in her pretty bride's traveling gown.

She checked Aphrodite, looked wisely around at her lovely sisters, then turned to remount the stairs, summoning them with a gay little confidential gesture.

And when the breathless crew had trooped after her, and the pad of little, eager, sandaled feet had died away on the thick rugs of the landing above, the poet, clasping his fat white hands, thumbs joined, across his rotund abdomen, stole a glance at his dazed son-in-law, which was partly apprehensive and partly significant, almost cunning. "An innocent saturnalia," he murmured. "The charming abandon of children." He unclasped one

hand and waved it. "Did you note the unstudied beauty of the composition as my babes glided in and out following the natural and archaic yet exquisitely balanced symmetry of the laws which govern mass and line composition, all unconsciously, yet perhaps"—he reversed his thumb and left his sign manual upon the atmosphere—"perhaps," he mused, overflowing with sweetness—"perhaps the laws of Art Nouveau are divine!—perhaps angels and cherubim, unseen, watch fondly o'er my babes, lest all unaware they guiltlessly violate some subtle canon of Art, marring the perfect symmetry of eternal preciousness."

Wayne's mouth was partly open, his eyes hopeless yet fixed upon the poet with a fearful fascination.

"Art," breathed the poet, "is a solemn, a fearful responsibility. *You* are responsible, George, and some day you must answer for every violation of Art, to the eternal outraged fitness of things. *You* must answer, *I* must answer, every soul must answer!"

"A-ans—answer! What, for God's sake?" stammered Wayne.

The poet, deliberately joining thumb and

forefinger, pinched out a portion of the atmosphere.

"That! *That* George! For that is Art! And Art is justice! And justice, affronted, demands an answer."

He refolded his arms, mused for a space, then stealing a veiled glance sideways:

"You—you are—ah—convinced that my two lost lambs need dread no bodily vicissitudes——"

"Cybele and Lissa?"

"Ah—yes——"

"Lethbridge will have money to burn if he likes the aroma of the smoke. Harrow has burnt several stacks already; but his father will continue to fire the furnace. Is *that* what you mean?"

"No!" said the poet softly, "no, George, that is not what I mean. Wealth is a great thing. Only the little things are precious to me. And the most precious of all is absolutely nothing!" But, as he wandered away into the great luxurious habitation of his son-in-law, his smile grew sweeter and sweeter and his half-closed eyes swam, melting into a saccharine reverie.

"The little things," he murmured, thumb-

ing the air absently—"the little things are precious, but not as precious as absolutely nothing. For nothing is perfection. Thank you," he said sweetly to a petrified footman, "thank you for understanding. It is precious —very, very precious to know that I am understood."

XII

BY early springtide the poet had taken an old-fashioned house on the south side of Washington Square; his sons-in-law standing for it—as the poet was actually beginning to droop amid the civilized luxury of Madison Avenue. He missed what he called his own "den." So he got it, rent free, and furnished it sparingly with furniture of a slabby variety until the effect produced might, profanely speaking, be described as dinky.

His friends, too, who haunted the house, bore curious conformity to the furnishing, being individually in various degrees either

squatty, slabby or dinky; and twice a week they gathered for "Conferences" upon what he and they described as "L'Arr Noovo."

L'Arr Noovo, a pleasing variation of the slab style in Art, had profoundly impressed the poet. Glass window-panes, designed with tulip patterns, were cunningly inserted into all sorts of furniture where window-glass didn't belong, and the effect appeared to be profitable; for up-stairs in his "shop," workmen were very busy creating extraordinary designs and setting tulip-patterned glass into everything with, as the poet explained, "a loving care" and considerable glue.

His four unmarried daughters came to see him, wandering unconcernedly between the four handsome residences of their four brothers-in-law and the "den" of the author of their being—Chlorippe, aged thirteen; Philodice, fourteen; Dione, fifteen, and Aphrodite, sixteen—lovely, fresh-skinned, free-limbed young girls with the delicate bloom of sun and wind still creaming their cheeks—lingering effects of a life lived ever in the open, until the poet's sons-in-law were able to support him in town in the style to which he had been unaccustomed.

To the Conferences of the poet came the mentally, morally, and physically dinky—and a few badgered but normal husbands, hustled thither by wives whose intellectual development was tending toward the precious.

People read poems, discussed Yeats, Shaw, Fiona, Mendes, and L'Arr Noovo; sang, wandered about pinching or thumbing the atmosphere under stimulus of a cunningly and unexpectedly set window-pane in the back of a "mission" rocking-chair. And when the proper moment arrived the poet would rise, exhaling sweetness from every pore of his bulky entity, to interpret what he called a "Thought." Sometimes it was a demonstration of the priceless value of "nothings"; sometimes it was a naive suggestion that no house could afford to be without an "Art"-rocker with Arr Noovo insertions. Such indispensable luxuries were on sale up-stairs. Again, he performed a "necklace of precious sounds"—in other words, some verses upon various topics, nature, woodchucks, and the dinkified in Art.

And it was upon one of these occasions that Aphrodite ran away.

Aphrodite, the sweet, the reasonable, the

self-possessed—Aphrodite ran away, having without any apparent reason been stricken with an overpowering aversion for civilization and Arr Noovo.

XIII

AT the poet's third Franco-American Conference that afternoon the room was still vibrating with the echoes of Aphrodite's harp accompaniment to her own singing, and gushing approbation had scarcely ceased, when the poet softly rose and stood with eyes half-closed as though concentrating all the sweetness within him upon the surface of his pursed lips.

A wan young man whose face figured only as a by-product of his hair whispered "Hush!" and several people, who seemed to be more or less out of drawing, assumed

attitudes which emphasized the faulty draftsmanship.

"La Poésie!" breathed the poet; "Kesker say la poésie?"

"La poésie—say la vee!" murmured a young woman with profuse teeth.

"Wee, wee, say la vee!" cried several people triumphantly.

"Nong!" sighed the poet, spraying the hushed air with sweetness, "nong! Say pas le vee; say l'Immortalitay!"

After which the poet resumed his seat, and the by-product read, in French verse, "An Appreciation" of the works of Wilhelmina Ganderbury McNutt.

And that was the limit of the Franco portion of the Conference; the remainder being plain American.

Aphrodite, resting on her tall gilded harp, looked sullenly straight before her. Somebody lighted a Chinese joss-stick, perhaps to kill the aroma of defunct cigarettes.

"Verse," said the poet, opening his heavy lids and gazing around him with the lambent-eyed wonder of a newly-wakened ram, "verse is a necklace of tinted sounds strung idly, yet lovingly, upon stray tinseled threads of

thought. . . . Thank you for understanding; thank you."

The by-product in the corner of the studio gathered arms and legs into a series of acute angles, and writhed; a lady ornamented with cheek-bones well sketched in, covered her eyes with one hand as though locked in jiu-jitsu with Richard Strauss.

Aphrodite's slender fingers, barely resting on the harp-strings, suddenly contracted in a nervous tremor; a low twang echoed the involuntary reflex with a discord.

A young man, whose neck was swathed in a stock à la d'Orsay, bent close to her shoulder.

"I feel that our souls, blindfolded, are groping toward one another," he whispered.

"Don't—don't talk like that!" she breathed almost fiercely; "I am tired—suffocated with sound, drugged with joss-sticks and sandal. I can't stand much more, I warn you."

"Are you not well, beloved."

"Perfectly well—physically. I don't know what it is—it has come so suddenly—this overwhelming revulsion—this exasperation with scents and sounds. . . . I could rip out these harp-strings and—and kick that chair

Aphrodite's slender fingers, barely resting on the harp-strings, suddenly contracted in a nervous tremor.

over! I—I think I need something—sunlight and the wind blowing my hair loose——"

The young man with the stock nodded. "It is the exquisite pagan athirst in you, scorched by the fire of spring. Quench that sweet thirst at the fount beautiful——"

"What fount did you say?" she asked dangerously.

"The precious fount of verse, dear maid."

"No!" she whispered violently. "I'm half drowned already. Words, smells, sounds, attitudes, rocking-chairs—and candles profaning the sunshine—I am suffocated, I need more air, more sense and less incense—less sound, less art——"

"Less—*what?*" he gasped.

"Less art!—what you call 'l'arr'!—yes, I've said it; I'm sick! sick of art! I know what I require now." And as he remained agape in shocked silence: "I don't mean to be rude, Mr. Frawley, but I also require less of you. . . . So much less that father will scarcely expect me to play any more accompaniments to your 'necklaces of precious tones'—so much less that the minimum of my interest in you vanishes to absolute negation. . . . So I shall not marry you."

"Aphrodite—are—are you mad?"

Her sulky red mouth was mute.

Meanwhile the poet's rich, resonant voice filled the studio with an agreeable and rambling monotone:

"Verse is a vehicle for expression; expression is a vehicle for verse; sound, in itself, is so subtly saturated with meaning that it requires nothing of added logic for its vindication. Sound, therefore, *is* sense, modified by the mysterious portent of tone. Thank you for understanding, thank you for a thought—very, very precious, a thought beautiful."

He smeared the air with inverted thumb and smiled at Mr. Frawley, who rose, somewhat agitated, and, crooking one lank arm behind his back, made a mechanical pinch at an atmospheric atom.

"If—if you do that again—if you dare to recite those verses about me, I shall go! I tell you I can't stand any more," breathed Aphrodite between her clenched teeth.

The young man cast his large and rather sickly eyes upon her. For a moment he was in doubt, but belief in the witchery of sound prevailed, for he had yet to meet a being insensible to the "music of the soul," and so

with a fond and fatuous murmur he pinched the martyred atmosphere once more, and began, mousily:

ALL

A tear a year
My pale desire requires,
And that is all.
Enlacements weary, passion tires,
Kisses are cinder-ghosts of fires
Smothered at birth with mortal earth;
And that is all.

A year of fear
My pallid soul desires
And that is all—
Terror of bliss and dread of happiness,
A subtle need of sorrow and distress
And you to weep one tear, no more, no less,
And that is all I ask—
And that is all.

People were breathing thickly; the poet unaffectedly distilled the suggested tear; it was a fat tear; it ran smoothly down his nose, twinkled, trembled, and fell.

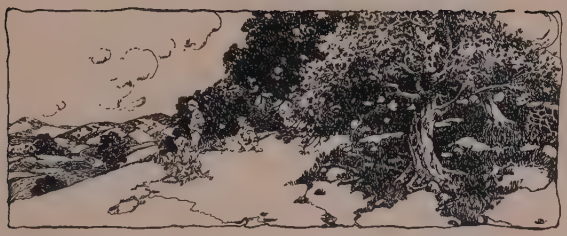
Aphrodite's features had become tense; she half rose, hesitated. Then, as the young man in the stock turned his invalid's eyes in her direction and began:

> Oh, sixteen tears
> In sixteen years——

she transfixed her hat with one nervous gesture, sprang to her feet, turned, and vanished through the door.

"She is too young to endure it," sobbed the by-product to her of the sketchy face. And that was no idle epigram, either.

XIV



SHE had no definite idea; all she craved for was the open—or its metropolitan substitute—sunshine, air, the glimpse of sanely preoccupied faces, the dull, quickening tumult of traffic. The tumult grew, increasing in her ears as she crossed Washington Square under the sycamores and looked up through tender feathery foliage at the white arch of marble through which the noble avenue flows away between its splendid arid chasms of marble, bronze, and masonry to that blessed leafy oasis in the north—the Park.

She took an omnibus, impatient for the green rambles of the only breathing-place she knew of, and settled back in her seat, rebellious of eye, sullen of mouth, scarcely noticing the amused expression of the young man opposite.

Two passengers left at Twenty-third Street, three at Thirty-fourth Street, and seven at Forty-second Street.

Preoccupied, she glanced up at the only passenger remaining, caught the fleeting shadow of interest on his face, regarded him with natural indifference, and looked out of the window, forgetting him. A few moments later, accidentally aware of him again, she carelessly noted his superficially attractive qualities, and, approving, resumed her idle inspection of the passing throng. But the next time her pretty head swung round she found him looking rather fixedly at her, and involuntarily she returned the gaze with a childlike directness—a gaze which he sustained to the limit of good breeding, then evaded so amiably that it left an impression rather agreeable than otherwise.

"I don't see," thought Aphrodite, "why I never meet that sort of man. He hasn't art

nouveau legs, and his features are not by-products of his hair. . . . I have told my brothers-in-law that I am old enough to go out without coming out. . . . And I am."

The lovely mouth grew sullen again: "I don't wish to wait two years and be what dreadful newspapers call a 'bud'! I wish to go to dinners and dances *now!* . . . Where I'll meet that sort of man. . . . The sort one feels almost at liberty to talk to without anybody presenting anybody. . . . I've a mind to look amiable the next time he——"

He raised his eyes at that instant; but she did not smile.

"I—I suppose that is the effect of civilization on me," she reflected—"metropolitan civilization. I felt like saying, 'For goodness' sake, let's say something'—even in spite of all my sisters have told me. I can't see why it would be dangerous for me to *look* amiable. If he glances at me again—so agreeably——"

He did; but she didn't smile.

"You see!" she said, accusing herself discontentedly; "you don't dare look human. Why? Because you've had it so drummed

into you that you can never, never again do anything natural. Why? Oh, because they all begin to talk about mysterious dangers when you say you wish to be natural. . . . I've made up my mind to look interested the next time he turns. . . . Why shouldn't he see that I'm quite willing to talk to him? . . . And I'm so tired of looking out of the window. . . . Before I came to this curious city I was never afraid to speak to anybody who attracted me. . . . And I'm not now. . . . So if he does look at me——"

He did.

The faintest glimmer of a smile troubled her lips. She thought: "I *do* wish he'd speak!"

There was a very becoming color in his face, partly because he was experienced enough not to mistake her; partly from a sudden and complete realization of her beauty.

"It's so odd," thought Aphrodite, "that attractive people consider it dangerous to speak to one another. I don't see any danger. . . . I wonder what he has in that square box beside him? It can't be a camera. . . . It *can't* be a folding easel! It simply *can't* be that *he* is an artist! a man like that——"

"*Are* you?" she asked quite involuntarily.

"What?" he replied, astonished, wheeling around.

"An—an artist. I can't believe it, and I don't wish to! You don't look it, you know!"

For a moment he could scarcely realize that she had spoken; his keen gaze dissected the face before him, the unembarrassed eyes, the oval contour, the smooth, flawless loveliness of a child.

"Yes, I am an artist," he said, considering her curiously.

"I am sorry," she said, "no, not sorry—only unpleasantly surprised. You see I am so tired of art—and I thought you looked so—so wholesome——"

He began to laugh—a modulated laugh—rather infectious, too, for Aphrodite bit her lip, then smiled, not exactly understanding it all.

"Why do you laugh?" she asked, still smiling. "Have I said something I should not have said?"

But he replied with a question: "Have you found art unwholesome?"

"I—I don't know," she answered with a little sigh; "I am so tired of it all. Don't let us talk about it—will you?"

"It isn't often I talk about it," he said, laughing again.

"Oh! That is unusual. Why don't you talk about art?"

"I'm much too busy."

"D—doing what? If that is not *very* impertinent."

"Oh, making pictures of things," he said, intensely amused.

"Pictures? You don't talk about art, and you paint pictures!"

"Yes."

"W—what kind? Do you mind my asking? You are so—so very unusual."

"Well, to earn my living, I make full-page pictures for magazines; to satisfy an absurd desire, I paint people—things—anything that might satisfy my color senses." He shrugged his shoulders gaily. "You see, I'm the sort you are so tired of——"

"But you *paint!* The artists I know don't paint—except *that* way—" She raised her pretty gloved thumb and made a gesture in the air; and, before she had achieved it, they were both convulsed with laughter.

"You never do that, do you?" she asked at length.

"No, I never do. I can't afford to decorate the atmosphere for nothing!"

"Then—then you are not interested in art nouveau?"

"No; and I never could see that beautiful music resembled frozen architecture."

They were laughing again, looking with confidence and delight upon one another as though they had started life's journey together in that ancient omnibus.

"*What* is a 'necklace of precious tones'?" she asked.

"Precious stones?"

"No, *tones!*"

"Let me cite, as an example, those beautiful verses of Henry Haynes," he replied gravely.

TO BE OR NOT TO BE

I'd rather be a Could Be,
If I can not be an Are;
For a Could Be is a May Be,
With a chance of touching par.

I had rather be a Has Been
Than a Might Have Been, by far;
For a Might Be is a Hasn't Been
But a Has was *once* an Are!

Also an Are is Is and Am;
A Was *was* all of these;
So I'd rather be a Has Been
Than a Hasn't, if you please.

And they fell a-laughing so shamelessly that the 'bus driver turned and squinted through his shutter at them, and the scandalized horses stopped of their own accord.

"Are you going to leave?" he asked as she rose.

"Yes; this is the Park," she said. "Thank you, and good-by."

He held the door for her; she nodded her thanks and descended, turning frankly to smile again in acknowledgment of his quickly lifted hat.

"He *was* nice," she reflected a trifle guiltily, "and I had a good time, and I really don't see any danger in it."

XV

SHE drew a deep, sweet breath as she entered the leafy shade and looked up into the bluest of cloudless skies. Odors of syringa and lilac freshened her, cleansing her of the last lingering taint of joss-sticks. The cardinal birds were very busy in the scarlet masses of Japanese quince; orioles fluttered among golden Forsythia; here and there an exotic starling preened and peered at the burnished purple grackle, stalking solemnly through the tender grass.

For an hour she walked vigorously, enchanted with the sun and sky and living green, through arbors heavy with wistaria, iris hued

and scented, through rambles under tall elms tufted with new leaves, past fountains splashing over, past lakes where water-fowl floated or stretched brilliant wings in the late afternoon sunlight. At times the summer wind blew her hair, and she lifted her lips to it, caressing it with every fiber of her; at times she walked pensively, wondering why she had been forbidden the Park unless accompanied.

"More danger, I suppose," she thought impatiently. . . . "Well, what is this danger that seems to travel like one's shadow, dogging a girl through the world? It seems to me that if all the pleasant things of life are so full of danger I'd better find out what it is. . . . I might as well look for it so that I'll recognize it when I encounter it. . . . And learn to keep away."

She scanned the flowery thickets attentively, looked behind her, then walked on.

"If it's robbers they mean," she reflected, "I'm a good wrestler, and I can make any one of my four brothers-in-law look foolish. . . . Besides, the Park is full of fat policemen. . . . And if they mean I'm likely to get lost, or run over, or arrested, or poisoned with soda-water and bonbons—" She

laughed to herself, swinging on in her free-limbed, wholesome beauty, scarcely noticing a man ahead, occupying a bench half hidden under the maple's foliage.

"So I'll just look about for this danger they are all afraid of, and when I see it, I'll know what to do," she concluded, paying not the slightest heed to the man on the bench until he rose, as she passed him, and took off his hat.

"You!" she exclaimed.

She had stopped short, confronting him with the fearless and charming directness natural to her. "What an amusing accident," she said frankly.

"The truth is," he began, "it is not exactly an accident."

"Isn't it?"

"N—no. . . . Are you offended?"

"Offended? No. Should I be? Why? . . . Besides, I suppose when we have finished this conversation you are going the *other* way."

"I—no, I wasn't."

"Oh! Then you are going to sit here?"

"Y—yes—I suppose so. . . . But I don't want to."

"Then why do you?"

"Well, if I'm not going the *other* way, and if I'm not going to remain here—" He looked at her, half laughing. She laughed, too, not exactly knowing why.

"Don't you really mind my walking a little way with you?" he asked.

"No, I don't. Why should I? Is there any reason? Am I not old enough to know why we should not walk together? Is it because the sun is going down? Is there what people call 'danger'?"

He was so plainly taken aback that her fair young face became seriously curious.

"*Is* there any reason why you should not walk with me?" she persisted.

The clear, direct gaze challenged him. He hesitated.

"Yes, there is," he said.

"A—a reason why you should not walk with me?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

And, as he did not find words to answer, she studied him for a moment, glanced up and down the woodland walk, then impulsively seated herself and motioned him to a place beside her on the bench.

"Now," she said, "I'm in a position to find out just what this danger is that they all warn me about. *You* know, don't you?"

"Know what?" he answered.

"About the danger that I seem to run every time I manage to enjoy myself. . . . And you *do* know; I see it by the way you look at me—and your expression is just like their expression when they tell me not to do things I find most natural."

"But—I—you——"

"You *must* tell me! I shall be thoroughly vexed with you if you don't."

Then he began to laugh, and she let him, leaning back to watch him with uncertain and speculative blue eyes. After a moment he said:

"You are absolutely unlike any girl I ever heard of. I am trying to get used to it—to adjust things. Will you help me?"

"How?" she asked innocently.

"Well, by telling me"—he looked at her a moment—"your age. You look about nineteen."

"I am sixteen and a half. I and all my sisters have developed our bodies so perfectly because, until we came to New York last au-

tumn, we had lived all our lives out-of-doors." She looked at him with a friendly smile. "Would you really like to know about us?"

"Intensely."

"Well, there are eight of us: Chlorippe, thirteen; Philodice, fourteen; Dione, fifteen; Aphrodite, sixteen—I am Aphrodite; Cybele, seventeen, married; Lissa, eighteen, married; Iole, nineteen, married, and Vanessa, twenty, married." She raised one small, gloved finger to emphasize the narrative. "All our lives we were brought up to be perfectly natural, to live, act, eat, sleep, play like primitive people. Our father dressed us like youths—boys, you know. Why," she said earnestly, "until we came to New York we had no idea that girls wore such lovely, fluffy underwear—but I believe I am not to mention such things; at least they have told me not to—but my straight front is still a novelty to me, and so are my stockings, so you won't mind if I've said something I shouldn't, will you?"

"No," he said; his face was expressionless.

"Then *that's* all right. So you see how it is; we don't quite know what we may do in this city. At first we were delighted to see so many attractive men, and we wanted to speak

to some of them who seemed to want to speak to us, but my father put a stop to that—but it's absurd to think all those men might be robbers, isn't it?"

"Very." There was not an atom of intelligence left in his face.

"So *that's* all right, then. Let me see, what was I saying? Oh, yes, I know! So four of my sisters were married, and we four remaining are being civilized. . . . But, oh—I wish I could be in the country for a little while! I'm so homesick for the meadows and brooks and my pajamas and my bare feet in sandals again. . . . And people seem to know so little in New York, and nobody understands us when we make little jests in Greek, or Latin, or Arabic, and nobody seems to have been very well educated and accomplished, so we feel strange at times."

"D—d—do you *do* all those things?"

"What things?"

"M—make jests in Arabic?"

"Why, yes. Don't you?"

"No. What else do you do?"

"Why, not many things."

"Music?"

"Oh, of course."

"Piano?"

"Yes, piano, violin, harp, guitar, zither—all that sort of thing. . . . Don't you?"

"No. What else?"

"Why—just various things, ride, swim, fence, box—I box pretty well—all those things——"

"Science, too?"

"Rudiments. Of course I couldn't, for example, discourse with authority upon the heteropterous mictidæ or tell you in what genus or genera the prothorax and femora are digitate; or whether climatic and polymorphic forms of certain diurnal lepidoptera occur within certain boreal limits. I have only a vague and superficial knowledge of any science, you see."

"I see," he said gravely.

She leaned foward thoughtfully, her pretty hands loosely interlaced upon her knee.

"Now," she said, "tell me about this danger that such a girl as I must guard against."

"There is no danger," he said slowly.

"But they told me——"

"Let them tell you what it is, then."

"No; you tell me?"

"I can't."

"Why?"

"Because—I simply can't."

"Are you ashamed to?"

"Perhaps—" He lifted his boxed sketching-kit by the strap, swung it, then set it carefully upon the ground: "Perhaps it is because I am ashamed to admit that there could be any danger to any woman in this world of men."

She looked at him so seriously that he straightened up and began to laugh. But she did not forget anything he had said, and she began her questions at once:

"Why should you not walk with me?"

"I'll take that back," he said, still laughing; "there is every reason why I should walk with you."

"Oh! . . . But you said——"

"All I meant was not for you, but for the ordinary sort of girl. Now, the ordinary, every-day, garden girl does not concern you——"

"Yes, she does! Why am I not like her?"

"Don't attempt to be——"

"*Am* I different—very different?"

"Superbly different!" The flush came to his face with the impulsive words.

She considered him in silence, then:

"Should I have been offended because you came into the Park to find me? And why did you? Do you find me interesting?"

"So interesting," he said, "that I don't know what I shall do when you go away."

Another pause; she was deeply absorbed with her own thoughts. He watched her, the color still in his face, and in his eyes a growing fascination.

"I'm not out," she said, resting her chin on one gloved hand, "so we're not likely to meet at any of those jolly things you go to. What do you think we'd better do?—because they've all warned me against doing just what you and I have done."

"Speaking without knowing each other?" he asked guiltily.

"Yes. . . . But I did it first to you. Still, when I tell them about it, they won't let you come to visit me. I tried it once. I was in a car, and such an attractive man looked at me as though he wanted to speak, and so when I got out of the car he got out, and I thought he seemed rather timid, so I asked him where Tiffany's was. I really didn't know, either. So we had such a jolly walk together up Fifth Avenue, and when I

said good-by he was so anxious to see me again, and I told him where I lived. But—do you know?—when I explained about it at home they acted so strangely, and they never would tell me whether or not he ever came."

"Then you intend to tell them all about—*us?*"

"Of course. I've disobeyed them."

"And—and I am never to see you again?"

"Oh, I'm very disobedient," she said innocently. "If I wanted to see you I'd do it."

"But *do* you?"

"I—I am not sure. Do you want to see me?"

His answer was stammered and almost incoherent. That, and the color in his face and the *something* in his eyes, interested her.

"Do you really find me so attractive?" she asked, looking him directly in the eyes. "You must answer me quickly; see how dark it is growing! I must go. Tell me, do you like me?"

"I never cared so much for—for any woman——"

She dimpled with delight and lay back regarding him under level, unembarrassed brows.

"That is very pleasant," she said. "I've often wished that a man—of your kind—would say that to me. I do wish we could be together a great deal, because you like me so much already and I truly do find you agreeable. . . . Say it to me again—about how much you like me."

"I—I—there is no woman—none I ever saw so—so interesting. . . . I mean more than that."

"Say it then."

"Say what I mean?"

"Yes."

"I am afraid——"

"Afraid? Of what?"

"Of offending you——"

"Is it an offense to me to tell me how much you like me? *How* can it offend me?"

"But—it is incredible! You won't believe——"

"Believe what?"

"That in so short a time I—I could care for you so much——"

"But I shall believe you. I know how I feel toward you. And every time you speak to me I feel more so."

"Feel more so?" he stammered.

"Yes, I experience more delight in what you say. Do you think I am insensible to the way you look at me?"

"You—you mean—" He simply could not find words.

She leaned back, watching him with sweet composure; then laughed a little and said: "Do you suppose that you and I are going to fall in love with one another?"

In the purpling dusk the perfume of wistaria grew sweeter and sweeter.

"I've done it already—" His voice shook and failed; a thrush, invisible in shadowy depths, made soft, low sounds.

"You *love* me—already?" she exclaimed under her breath.

"Love you! I—I—there are no words—" The thrush stirred the sprayed foliage and called once, then again, restless for the moon.

Her eyes wandered over him thoughtfully: "So *that* is love. . . . I didn't know. . . . I supposed it could be nothing pleasanter than friendship, although they say it is. . . . But how could it be? There is nothing pleasanter than friendship. . . . I am perfectly delighted that you love me. Shall we marry some day, do you think?"

He strove to speak, but her frankness stunned him.

"I meant to tell you that I am engaged," she observed. "Does that matter?"

"Engaged!" He found his tongue quickly enough then; and she, surprised, interested, and in nowise dissenting, listened to his eloquent views upon the matter of Mr. Frawley, whom she, during the lucid intervals of his silence, curtly described.

"Do you know," she said with great relief, "that I always felt that way about love, because I never knew anything about it except from the symptoms of Mr. Frawley? So when they told me that love and friendship were different, I supposed it must be so, and I had no high opinion of love . . . until you made it so agreeable. Now I—I prefer it to anything else. . . . I could sit here with you all day, listening to you. Tell me some more."

XVI

HE did. She listened, sometimes intently interested, absorbed, sometimes leaning back dreamily, her eyes partly veiled under silken lashes, her mouth curved with the vaguest of smiles.

He spoke as a man who awakes with a start—not very clearly at first, then with feverish coherence, at times with recklessness almost eloquent. Still only half awakened himself, still scarcely convinced, scarcely credulous that this miracle of an hour had been wrought in him, here under the sky and setting sun and new-born leaves, he spoke not only to her

but of her to himself, formulating in words the rhythm his pulses were beating, interpreting this surging tide which thundered in his heart, clamoring out the fact—the fact—the fact that he loved!—that love was on him like the grip of Fate—on him so suddenly, so surely, so inexorably, that, stricken as he was, the clutch only amazed and numbed him.

He spoke, striving to teach himself that the incredible was credible, the impossible possible —that it was done! done! done! and that he loved a woman in an hour because, in an hour, he had read her innocence as one reads through crystal, and his eyes were opened for the first time upon loveliness unspoiled, sweetness untainted, truth uncompromised.

"Do you know," she said, "that, as you speak, you make me care for you so much more than I supposed a girl could care for a man?"

"Can you love me?"

"Oh, I do already! I don't mean mere love. It is something—*something* that I never knew about before. *Every*thing about you is so—so exactly what I care for—your voice, your head, the way you think, the way you look at me. I never thought of men as I am

thinking about you. . . . I want you to belong to me—all alone. . . . I want to see how you look when you are angry, or worried, or tired. I want you to think of me when you are perplexed and unhappy and ill. Will you? You *must!* There is nobody else, is there? If you do truly love me?"

"Nobody but you."

"That is what I desire. . . . I want to live with you—I promise I won't talk about art—even *your* art, which I might learn to care for. All I want is to really live and have your troubles to meet and overcome them because I will not permit anything to harm you. . . . I will love you enough for that. . . . I—do you love other women?"

"Good God, no!"

"And you shall not!" She leaned closer, looking him through and through. "I *will* be what you love! I *will* be what you desire most in all the world. I will be to you everything you wish, in every way, always, ever, and forever and ever. . . . Will you marry me?"

"Will *you?*"

"Yes."

She suddenly stripped off her glove,

wrenched a ring set with brilliants from the third finger of her left hand, and, rising, threw it, straight as a young boy throws, far out into deepening twilight. It was the end of Mr. Frawley; he, too, had not only become a by-product but a good-by product. Yet his modest demands had merely required a tear a year! Perhaps he had not asked enough. Love pardons the selfish.

She was laughing, a trifle excited, as she turned to face him where he had risen. But, at the touch of his hand on hers, the laughter died at a breath, and she stood, her limp hand clasped in his, silent, expressionless, save for the tremor of her mouth.

"I—I must go," she said, shrinking from him.

He did not understand, thrilled as he was by the contact, but he let her soft hand fall away from his.

Then with a half sob she caught her own fingers to her lips and kissed them where the pressure of his hand burned her white flesh—kissed them, looking at him.

"You—you find a child—you leave a woman," she said unsteadily. "Do you understand how I love you—for that?"

He caught her in his arms.

"No—not yet—not my mouth!" she pleaded, holding him back; "I love you too much—already *too* much. Wait! Oh, *will* you wait? . . . And let me wait—*make* me wait? . . . I—I begin to understand some things I did not know an hour ago."

In the dusk he could scarcely see her as she swayed, yielding, her arms tightening about his neck in the first kiss she had ever given or forgiven in all her life.

And through the swimming tumult of their senses the thrush's song rang like a cry. The moon had risen.

XVII

DOUNTING the deadened stairway noiselessly to her sister's room, groping for the door in the dark of the landing, she called: "Iole!" And again: "Iole! Come to me! It is I!"

The door swung noiselessly; a dim form stole forward, wide-eyed and white in the electric light.

Then down at her sister's feet dropped Aphrodite, and laid a burning face against her silken knees. And, "Oh, Iole, Iole," she whispered, "Iole, Iole, Iole! There is danger, as you say—there is, and I understand it . . . now. . . . But I love him so—I—I have been so happy—so happy! Tell me what I

have done . . . and how wrong it is! Oh, Iole, Iole! What have I done!"

"Done, child! What in the name of all the gods have you done?"

"Loved him—in the names of all the gods! Oh, Iole! Iole! Iole!"

. . . . . .

"——The thrush singing in darkness; the voice of spring calling, calling me to his arms! Oh, Iole, Iole!—these, and my soul and his, alone under the pagan moon! alone, save for the old gods whispering in the dusk——"

. . . . . .

"——And listening, I heard the feathery tattoo of wings close by—the wings of Eros all aquiver like a soft moth trembling ere it flies! Peril divine! I understood it then. And, stirring in darkness, sweet as the melody of unseen streams, I heard the old gods laughing. . . . *Then* I knew."

. . . . . .

"Is that all, little sister?"

"Almost all."

"What more?"

. . . . . .

And when, at length, the trembling tale was told, Iole caught her in her white arms, looked

at her steadily, then kissed her again and again.

"If he is all you say—this miracle—I—I think I can make them understand," she whispered. "Where is he?"

"D-down-stairs—at b-bay! Hark! You can hear George swearing! Oh, Iole, don't let him!"

In the silence from the drawing-room below came the solid sobs of the poet:

"P-pup! P-p-penniless pup!"

"He *must* not say that!" cried Aphrodite fiercely. "Can't you make father and George understand that he has nearly six hundred dollars in the bank?"

"I will try," said Iole tenderly. "Come!"

And with one arm around Aphrodite she descended the great stairway, where, on the lower landing, immensely interested, sat Chlorippe, Philodice and Dione, observant, fairly aquiver with intelligence.

"Oh, that young man is catching it!" remarked Dione, looking up as Iole passed, her arm close around her sister's waist. "George has said 'dammit' seven times and father is rocking—not in a rocking-chair—just rocking and expressing his inmost thoughts. And Mr.

Briggs pretends to scowl and mutters: 'Hook him over the ropes, George. 'E ain't got no friends!' Take a peep, Iole. You can just see them if you lean over and hang on to the banisters——"

But Iole brushed by her younger sisters, Aphrodite close beside her, and, entering the great receiving-hall, stood still, her clear eyes focused upon her husband's back.

"George!"

Mr. Wayne stiffened and wheeled; Mr. Briggs sidled hastily toward the doorway, crabwise; the poet choked back the word, "Phup!" and gazed at his tall daughter with apprehension and protruding lips.

"Iole," began Wayne, "this is no place for you! Aphrodite! let that fellow alone, I say!"

Iole turned, following with calm eyes the progress of her sister toward a tall young man who stood by the window, a red flush staining his strained face.

The tense muscles in jaw and cheek relaxed as Aphrodite laid one hand on his arm; the poet, whose pursed lips were overloaded, expelled a passionate "Phupp!" and the young man's eyes narrowed again at the shot.

Then silence lengthened to a waiting menace, and even the three sisters on the stairs succumbed to the oppressive stillness. And all the while Iole stood like a white Greek goddess under the glory of her hair, looking full into the eyes of the tall stranger.

A minute passed; a glimmer dawned to a smile and trembled in the azure of Iole's eyes; she slowly lifted her arms, white hands outstretched, looking steadily at the stranger.

He came, tense, erect; Iole's cool hands dropped in his. And, turning to the others with a light on her face that almost blinded him, she said, laughing: "Do you not understand? Aphrodite brings us the rarest gift in the world in this tall young brother! Look! Touch him! We have never seen his like before for all the wisdom of wise years. For he is one of few—and men are many, and artists legion—this honorable miracle, this sane and wholesome wonder! this trinity, Lover, Artist, and Man!"

And, turning again, she looked him wistfully, wonderingly, in the eyes.

(1)

THE END